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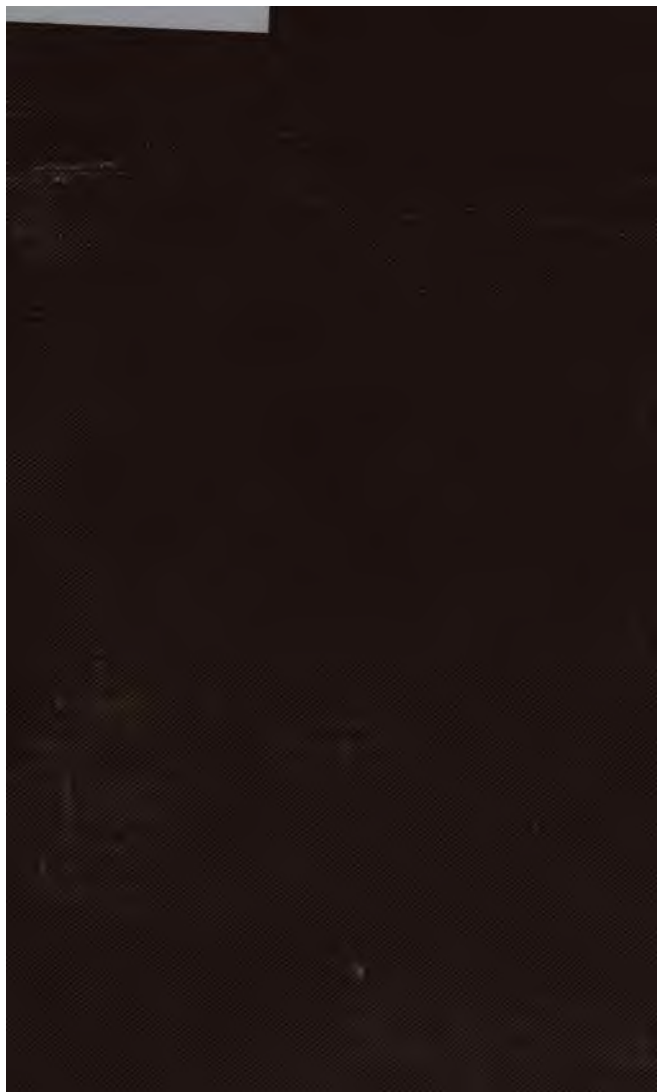
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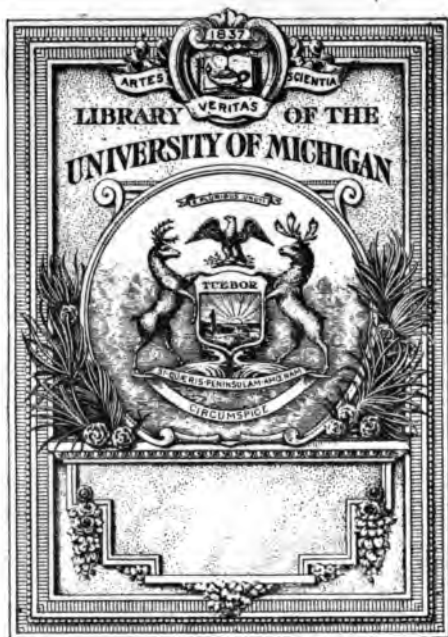
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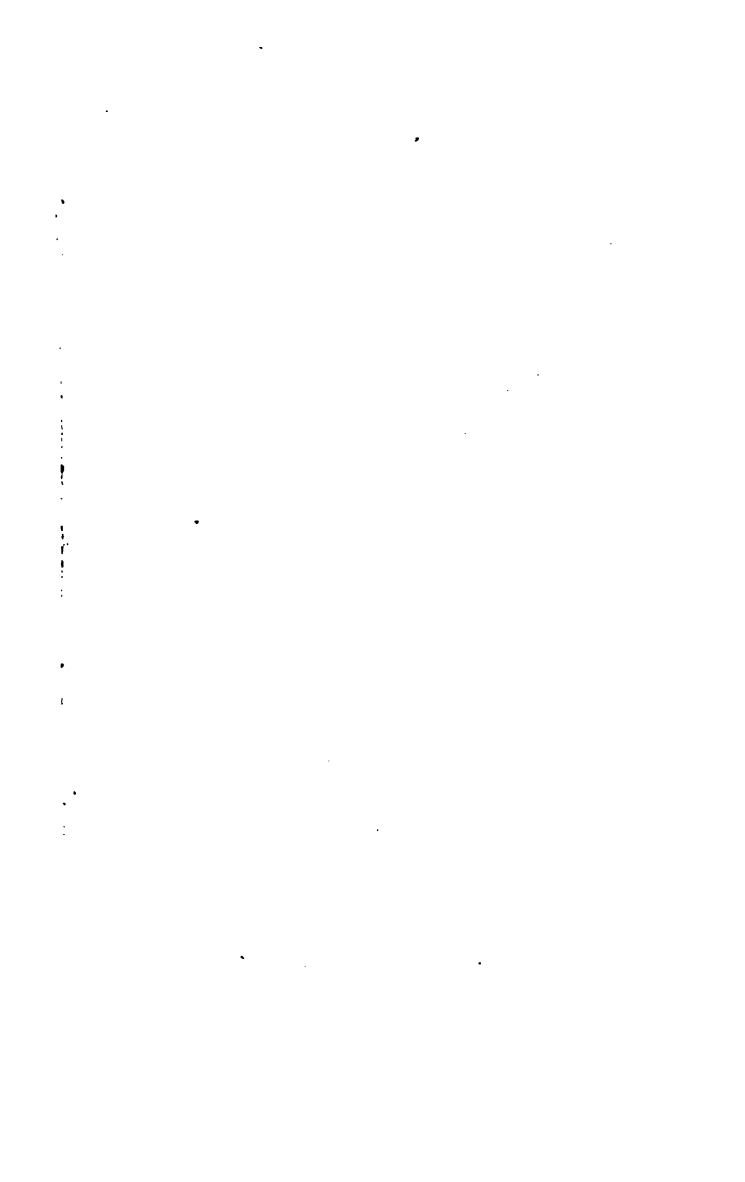
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THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE

A BUNDLE OF LETTERS

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY

EUGENE PICKERING



✓
MADONNA OF THE FUTURE:
BUNDLE OF LETTERS: THE
DIARY OF A MAN OF
FIFTY: EUGENE
PICKERING

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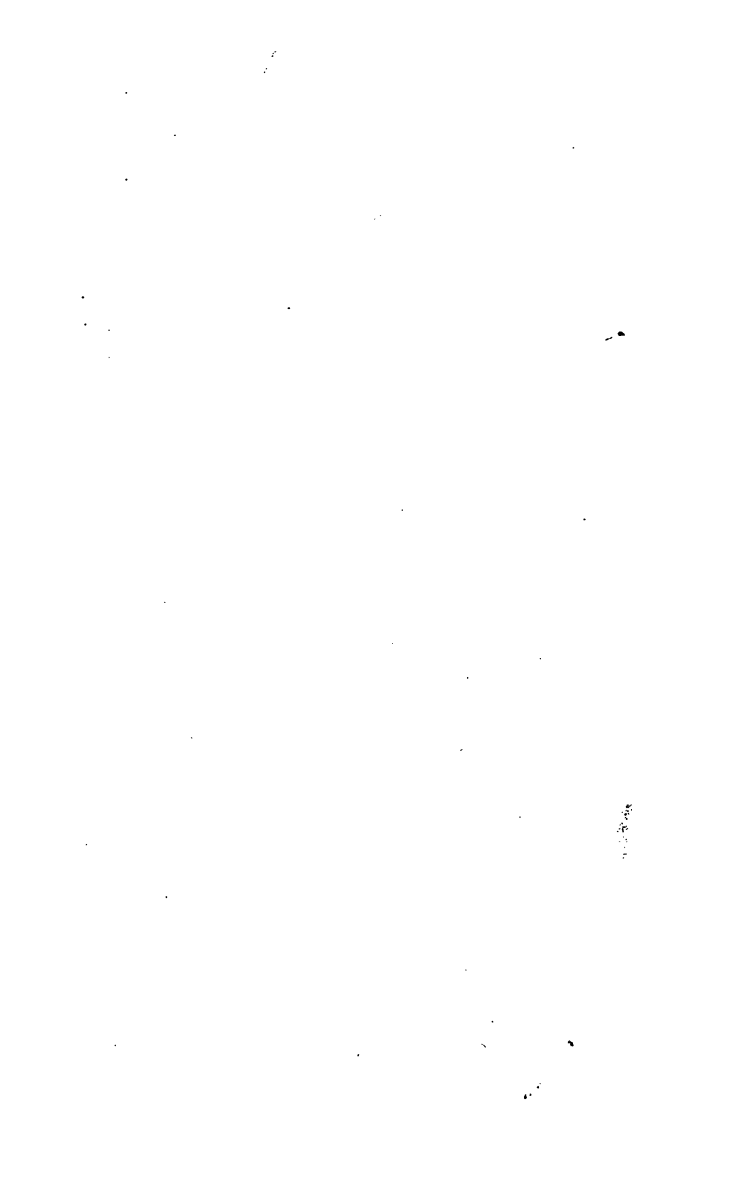
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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE . . .	I
A BUNDLE OF LETTERS	47
THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY . . .	91
EUGENE PICKERING	131



THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE



THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

We had been talking about the masters who had achieved but a single masterpiece—the artists and poets who but once in their lives had known the divine afflatus and touched the high level of perfection. Our host had been showing us a charming little cabinet picture by a painter whose name we had never heard, and who, after this single spasmodic bid for fame, had apparently relapsed into obscurity and mediocrity. There was some discussion as to the frequency of this phenomenon; during which, I observed, H—— sat silent, finishing his cigar with a meditative air, and looking at the picture which was being handed round the table. “I don’t know how common a case it is,” he said at last, “but I have seen it. I have known a poor fellow who painted his masterpiece, and”—he added with a smile—“he did not even paint that. He made his bid for fame and missed it.” We all knew H—— for a clever man who had seen much of men and manners, and had a great store of reminiscences. Some one immediately questioned him further, and while I was engrossed with the stories of my neighbour over the little picture, he was allowed to tell his tale. If I were to doubt whether it was worth bearing repeating, I should only have to remember that charming woman, our hostess, who had left

the table, ventured back in rustling rose-colour to pronounce our lingering a want of gallantry, and, finding us a listening circle, sank into her chair in spite of cigars, and heard the story out so graciously that, when the catastrophe was reached, she glanced across at me and showed me a tear in each of her beautiful eyes.

It relates to my youth, and to Italy : two fine things (H—— began). I had arrived late in the evening at Florence, and while I finished my bottle of wine at supper, had fancied that, tired traveller though I was, I might pay the city a finer compliment than by vulgarly to bed. A narrow passage wandered away out of the little square before my hotel, and as if it bored into the heart of Florence. I followed and at the end of ten minutes emerged upon a piazza, filled only with the mild autumn moonlight. Opposite rose the Palazzo Vecchio, like some huge civic fortress, with the great bell-tower springing from its embattled verge as a mountain-pine from the edge of a cliff. At its base, in its projected shadow, gleamed certain dim sculptures which I wonderingly approached. One of the images, on the left of the palace door, was a magnificent colossus, shining through the dusky like a sentinel who has taken the alarm. In a moment I recognised him as Michael Angelo's *David*. I turned with a certain relief from his sinister strength to a slender figure in bronze, stationed beneath the high light loggia, which opposes the free and elegant span of its arches to the dead masonry of the palace ; a figure supremely shapely and graceful ; gentle, almost, in spite of his holding out with his light nervous arm the snaky head of the slaughtered Gorgon. His name is Perseus, and you may read his story, not in the Greek mythology, but in the memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini. Glancing from one of these fine fellows to the other, I probably uttered some irrepressible commonplace of praise, for, as

if provoked by my voice, a man rose from the steps of the loggia, where he had been sitting in the shadow, and addressed me in good English—a small, slim personage, clad in a sort of black velvet tunic (as it seemed), and with a mass of auburn hair, which gleamed in the moonlight, escaping from a little mediæval birretta. In a tone of the most insinuating deference he asked me for my “impressions.” He seemed picturesque, fantastic, slightly unreal. Hovering there in this consecrated neighbourhood, he might have passed for the genius of æsthetic hospitality—if the genius of æsthetic hospitality is not commonly some shabby little custode, flourishing a calico pocket-handkerchief and openly resentful of the divided franc. This analogy was made none the less complete by the brilliant tirade with which he greeted my embarrassed silence.

“I have known Florence long, sir, but I have never known her so lovely as to-night. It’s as if the ghosts of her past were abroad in the empty streets. The present is sleeping; the past hovers about us like a dream made visible. Fancy the old Florentines strolling up in couples to pass judgment on the last performance of Michael, of Benvenuto! We should come in for a precious lesson if we might overhear what they say. The plainest burgher of them, in his cap and gown, had a taste in the matter! That was the prime of art, sir. The sun stood high in heaven, and his broad and equal blaze made the darkest places bright and the dullest eyes clear. We live in the evening of time! We grope in the gray dusk, carrying each our poor little taper of selfish and painful wisdom, holding it up to the great models and to the dim idea, and seeing nothing but overwhelming greatness and dimness. The days of illumination are gone! But do you know I fancy—I fancy”—and he grew suddenly almost familiar in this visionary fervour—“I fancy the light of that time rests upon us here for an hour! I have never seen the David

6 THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

so grand, the Perseus so fair! Even the inferior productions of John of Bologna and of Baccio Bandinelli seem to realise the artist's dream. I feel as if the moonlit air were charged with the secrets of the masters, and as if, standing here in religious attention, we might —we might witness a revelation!" Perceiving at this moment, I suppose, my halting comprehension reflected in my puzzled face, this interesting rhapsodist paused and blushed. Then with a melancholy smile, "You think me a moonstruck charlatan, I suppose. It's not my habit to hang about the piazza and pounce upon innocent tourists. But to-night, I confess, I am under the charm. And then, somehow, I fancied you too were an artist!"

"I am not an artist, I am sorry to say, as you must understand the term. But pray make no apologies. I am also under the charm; your eloquent remarks have only deepened it."

"If you are not an artist you are worthy to be one!" he rejoined, with an expressive smile. "A young man who arrives at Florence late in the evening, and, instead of going prosaically to bed, or hanging over the traveller's book at his hotel, walks forth without loss of time to pay his devoirs to the beautiful, is a young man after my own heart!"

The mystery was suddenly solved; my friend was an American! He must have been, to take the picturesque so prodigiously to heart. "None the less so, I trust," I answered, "if the young man is a sordid New Yorker."

"New Yorkers have been munificent patrons of art," he answered, urbanely.

For a moment I was alarmed. Was this midnight reverie mere Yankee enterprise, and was he simply a desperate brother of the brush who had posted himself here to extort an "order" from a sauntering tourist? But I was not called to defend myself. A great brass note broke suddenly from the far-off summit of the be

tower above us, and sounded the first stroke of midnight. My companion started, apologised for detaining me, and prepared to retire. But he seemed to offer so lively a promise of further entertainment that I was indisposed to part with him, and suggested that we should stroll homeward together. He cordially assented; so we turned out of the Piazza, passed down before the statued arcade of the Uffizi, and came out upon the Arno. What course we took I hardly remember, but we roamed slowly about for an hour, my companion delivering by snatches a sort of moon-touched æsthetic lecture. I listened in puzzled fascination, and wondered who the deuce he was. He confessed with a melancholy but all-respectful head-shake to his American origin.

"We are the disinherited of Art!" he cried. "We are condemned to be superficial! We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit. Yes! we are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense. We have neither taste, nor tact, nor power. How should we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely circumstance, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist, as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so! We poor aspirants must live in perpetual exile."

"You seem fairly at home in exile," I answered, "and Florence seems to me a very pretty Siberia. But do you know my own thought? Nothing is so idle as to talk about our want of a nutritive soil, of opportunity, of inspiration, and all the rest of it. The worthy part is to do something fine! There is no law in our glorious Constitution against that. Invent, create, achieve! No matter if you have to study fifty times as much as one of these! What else are you an artist for? Be you our Moses," I added, laughing, and laying my

hand on his shoulder, "and lead us out of the house of bondage!"

"Golden words—golden words, young man!" he cried, with a tender smile. "'Invent, create, achieve!' Yes, that's our business; I know it well. Don't take me, in Heaven's name, for one of your barren complainers—impotent cynics who have neither talent nor faith! I am at work!"—and he glanced about him and lowered his voice as if this were a quite peculiar secret—"I'm at work night and day. I have undertaken a *creation*! I am no Moses; I am only a poor patient artist; but it would be a fine thing if I were to cause some slender stream of beauty to flow in our thirsty land! Don't think me a monster of conceit," he went on, as he saw me smile at the avidity with which he adopted my illustration; "I confess that I am in one of those moods when great things seem possible! This is one of my nervous nights—I dream waking! When the south wind blows over Florence at midnight it seems to coax the soul from all the fair things locked away in her churches and galleries; it comes into my own little studio with the moonlight, and sets my heart beating too deeply for rest. You see I am always adding a thought to my conception! This evening I felt that I couldn't sleep unless I had communed with the genius of Buonarotti!"

He seemed deeply versed in local history and tradition, and he expatiated *con amore* on the charms of Florence. I gathered that he was an old resident, and that he had taken the lovely city into his heart. "I owe her everything," he declared. "It's only since I came here that I have really lived, intellectually. One by one, all profane desires, all mere worldly aims, have dropped away from me, and left me nothing but my pencil, my little note-book" (and he tapped his breast-pocket), "and the worship of the pure masters—those who were pure because they were innocent, and those who were pure because they were strong!"

"And have you been very productive all this time?" I asked sympathetically.

He was silent a while before replying. "Not in the vulgar sense!" he said at last. "I have chosen never to manifest myself by imperfection. The good in every performance I have re-absorbed into the generative force of new creations; the bad—there is always plenty of that—I have religiously destroyed. I may say, with some satisfaction, that I have not added a mite to the rubbish of the world. As a proof of my conscientiousness"—and he stopped short, and eyed me with extraordinary candour, as if the proof were to be overwhelming—"I have never sold a picture! 'At least no merchant traffics in my heart!' Do you remember that divine line in Browning? My little studio has never been profaned by superficial, feverish, mercenary work. It's a temple of labour, but of leisure! Art is long. If we work for ourselves, of course we must hurry. If we work for her, we must often pause. She can wait!"

This had brought us to my hotel door, somewhat to my relief, I confess, for I had begun to feel unequal to the society of a genius of this heroic strain. I left him, however, not without expressing a friendly hope that we should meet again. The next morning my curiosity had not abated; I was anxious to see him by common daylight. I counted upon meeting him in one of the many pictorial haunts of Florence, and I was gratified without delay. I found him in the course of the morning in the Tribune of the Uffizi—that little treasure-chamber of world-famous things. He had turned his back on the Venus de' Medici, and with his arms resting on the railing which protects the pictures, and his head buried in his hands, he was lost in the contemplation of that superb triptych of Andrea Mantegna—a work which has neither the material splendour nor the commanding force of some of its neighbours, but which, glowing there with the loveliness of patient labour, suits possibly a

more constant need of the soul. I looked at the picture for some time over his shoulder; at last, with a heavy sigh, he turned away and our eyes met. As he recognised me a deep blush rose to his face; he fancied, perhaps, that he had made a fool of himself overnight. But I offered him my hand with a friendliness which assured him I was not a scoffer. I knew him by his ardent *chevelure*; otherwise he was much altered. His midnight mood was over, and he looked as haggard as an actor by daylight. He was far older than I had supposed, and he had less bravery of costume and gesture. He seemed the quiet, poor, patient artist he had proclaimed himself, and the fact that he had never sold a picture was more obvious than glorious. His velvet coat was threadbare, and his short slouched hat, of an antique pattern, revealed a rustiness which marked it an "original," and not one of the picturesque reproductions which brethren of his craft affect. His eye was mild and heavy, and his expression singularly gentle and acquiescent; the more so for a certain pallid leanness of visage, which I hardly knew whether to refer to the consuming fire of genius or to a meagre diet. A very little talk, however, cleared his brow and brought back his eloquence.

"And this is your first visit to these enchanted halls?" he cried. "Happy, thrice happy youth!" And taking me by the arm, he prepared to lead me to each of the pre-eminent works in turn and show me the cream of the gallery. But before we left the Mantegna he pressed my arm and gave it a loving look. "*He* was not in a hurry," he murmured. "He knew nothing of 'raw Haste, half-sister to Delay!'" How sound a critic my friend was I am unable to say, but he was an extremely amusing one; overflowing with opinions, theories, and sympathies, with disquisition and gossip and anecdote. He was a shade too sentimental for my own sympathies, and I fancied he was rather too fond

of superfine discriminations and of discovering subtle intentions in shallow places. At moments, too, he plunged into the sea of metaphysics, and floundered a while in waters too deep for intellectual security. But his abounding knowledge and happy judgment told a touching story of long attentive hours in this worshipful company; there was a reproach to my wasteful saunterings in so devoted a culture of opportunity. "There are two moods," I remember his saying, "in which we may walk through galleries—the critical and the ideal. They seize us at their pleasure, and we can never tell which is to take its turn. The critical mood, oddly, is the genial one, the friendly, the condescending. It relishes the pretty trivialities of art, its vulgar cleverness, its conscious graces. It has a kindly greeting for anything which looks as if, according to his light, the painter had enjoyed doing it—for the little Dutch cabbages and kettles, for the taper fingers and breezy mantles of late-coming Madonnas, for the little blue-hilled, pastoral, sceptical Italian landscapes. Then there are the days of fierce, fastidious longing—solemn church feasts of the intellect—when all vulgar effort and all petty success is a weariness, and everything but the best—the best of the best—disgusts. In those hours we are relentless aristocrats of taste. We will not take Michael Angelo for granted, we will not swallow Raphael whole!"

The gallery of the Uffizi is not only rich in its possessions, but peculiarly fortunate in that fine architectural accident, as one may call it, which unites it—with the breadth of river and city between them—to those princely chambers of the Pitti Palace. The Louvre and the Vatican hardly give you such a sense of sustained inclosure as those long passages projected over street and stream to establish a sort of inviolate transition between the two palaces of art. We passed along the gallery in which those precious drawings by eminent hands hang

chaste and gray above the swirl and murmur of the yellow Arno, and reached the ducal saloons of the Pitti. Ducal as they are, it must be confessed that they are imperfect as show-rooms, and that, with their deep-set windows and their massive mouldings, it is rather a broken light that reaches the pictured walls. But here the masterpieces hang thick, and you seem to see them in a luminous atmosphere of their own. And the great saloons, with their superb dim ceilings, their outer wall in splendid shadow, and the sombre opposite glow of mellow canvas and dusky gilding, make, themselves, almost as fine a picture as the Titians and Raphaels they imperfectly reveal. We lingered briefly before many a Raphael and Titian ; but I saw my friend was impatient, and I suffered him at last to lead me directly to the goal of our journey—the most tenderly fair of Raphael's virgins, the Madonna in the Chair. Of all the fine pictures of the world, it seemed to me this is the one with which criticism has least to do. None betrays less effort, less of the mechanism of success and of the irrepressible discord between conception and result, which shows dimly in so many consummate works. Graceful, human, near to our sympathies as it is, it has nothing of manner, of method, nothing, almost, of style ; it blooms there in rounded softness, as instinct with harmony as if it were an immediate exhalation of genius. The figure melts away the spectator's mind into a sort of passionate tenderness which he knows not whether he has given to heavenly purity or to earthly charm. He is intoxicated with the fragrance of the tenderest blossom of maternity that ever bloomed on earth.

"That's what I call a fine picture," said my companion, after we had gazed a while in silence. "I have a right to say so, for I have copied it so often and so carefully that I could repeat it now with my eyes shut. (Other works are of Raphael: this is Raphael himself.) Others you can praise, you can qualify, you can measure,

explain, account for : this you can only love and admire. I don't know in what seeming he walked among men while this divine mood was upon him ; but after it, surely, he could do nothing but die ; this world had nothing more to teach him. Think of it a while, my friend, and you will admit that I am not raving. Think of his seeing that spotless image, not for a moment, for a day, in a happy dream, or a restless fever-fit ; not as a poet in a five minutes' frenzy—time to snatch his phrase and scribble his immortal stanza ; but for days together, while the slow labour of the brush went on, while the foul vapours of life interposed, and the fancy ached with tension, fixed, radiant, distinct, as we see it now ! What a master, certainly ! But ah ! what a seer !”

“Don't you imagine,” I answered, “that he had a model, and that some pretty young woman——”

“As pretty a young woman as you please ! It doesn't diminish the miracle ! He took his hint, of course, and the young woman, possibly, sat smiling before his canvas. But, meanwhile, the painter's idea had taken wings. No lovely human outline could charm it to vulgar fact. He saw the fair form made perfect ; he rose to the vision without tremor, without effort of wing ; he communed with it face to face, and resolved into finer and lovelier truth the purity which completes it as the fragrance completes the rose. That's what they call idealism ; the word's vastly abused, but the thing is good. It's my own creed, at any rate. Lovely Madonna, model at once and muse, I call you to witness that I too am an idealist !”

“An idealist, then,” I said, half jocosely, wishing to provoke him to further utterance, “is a gentleman who says to Nature in the person of a beautiful girl, ‘Go to, you are all wrong ! Your fine is coarse, your bright is dim, your grace is *gaucherie*. This is the way you should have done it !’ Is not the chance against him ?”

He turned upon me almost angrily, but perceiving the genial savour of my sarcasm, he smiled gravely. "Look at that picture," he said, "and cease your irreverent mockery! Idealism is *that*! There's no explaining it; one must feel the flame! It says nothing to Nature, or to any beautiful girl, that they will not both forgive! It says to the fair woman, 'Accept me as your artist friend, lend me your beautiful face, trust me, help me, and your eyes shall be half my masterpiece!' No one so loves and respects the rich realities of nature as the artist whose imagination caresses and flatters them. He knows what a fact may hold (whether Raphael knew, you may judge by his portrait, behind us there, of Tommaso Inghirami); but his fancy hovers above it, as Ariel hovered above the sleeping prince. There is only one Raphael, but an artist may still be an artist. As I said last night, the days of illumination are gone; visions are rare; we have to look long to see them. But in meditation we may still cultivate the ideal; round it, smooth it, perfect it. The result—the result," (here his voice faltered suddenly, and he fixed his eyes for a moment on the picture; when they met my own again they were full of tears)—"the result may be less than this; but still it may be good, it may be *great*!" he cried with vehemence. "It may hang somewhere, in after years, in goodly company, and keep the artist's memory warm. Think of being known to mankind after some such fashion as this! of hanging here through the slow centuries in the gaze of an altered world; living on and on in the cunning of an eye and hand that are part of the dust of ages, a delight and a law to remote generations; making beauty a force and purity an example!"

"Heaven forbid," I said, smiling, "that I should take the wind out of *your* sails! But doesn't it occur to you that, besides being strong in his genius, Raphael was happy in a certain good faith of which we have lost

it's a monstrous mistake. Is Florence of the same sex as New York, as Chicago? She is the sole perfect lady of them all; one feels towards her as a lad in his teens feels to some beautiful older woman with a 'history.' She fills you with a sort of aspiring gallantry." This disinterested passion seemed to stand my friend in stead of the common social ties; he led a lonely life, and cared for nothing but his work. I was duly flattered by his having taken my frivolous self into his favour, and by his generous sacrifice of precious hours to my society. We spent many of these hours among those early paintings in which Florence is so rich, returning ever and anon, with restless sympathies, to wonder whether these tender blossoms of art had not a vital fragrance and savour more precious than the full-fruited knowledge of the later works. We lingered often in the sepulchral chapel of San Lorenzo, and watched Michael Angelo's dim-visaged warrior sitting there like some awful Genius of Doubt and brooding behind his eternal mask upon the mysteries of life. We stood more than once in the little convent chambers where Fra Angelico wrought as if an angel indeed had held his hand, and gathered that sense of scattered dews and early bird-notes which makes an hour among his relics seem like a morning stroll in some monkish garden. We did all this and much more—wandered into dark chapels, damp courts, and dusty palace-rooms, in quest of lingering hints of fresco and lurking treasures of carving.

I was more and more impressed with my companion's remarkable singleness of purpose. Everything was a pretext for some wildly idealistic rhapsody or reverie. Nothing could be seen or said that did not lead him sooner or later to a glowing discourse on the true, the beautiful, and the good. If my friend was not a genius, he was certainly a monomaniac; and I found as great a fascination in watching the odd lights and shades of his character as if he had been a creature from another planet.

He seemed, indeed, to know very little of this one, and lived and moved altogether in his own little province of art. A creature more unsullied by the world it is impossible to conceive, and I often thought it a flaw in his artistic character that he had not a harmless vice or two.

It amused me greatly at times to think that he was of our shrewd Yankee race; but, after all, there could be no better token of his American origin than this high æsthetic fever. The very heat of his devotion was a sign of conversion; those born to European opportunity manage better to reconcile enthusiasm with comfort. He had, moreover, all our native mistrust for intellectual discretion, and our native relish for sonorous superlatives. As a critic he was very much more generous than just, and his mildest terms of approbation were "stupendous," "transcendent," and "incomparable." The small change of admiration seemed to him no coin for a gentleman to handle; and yet, frank as he was intellectually, he was personally altogether a mystery. His professions, somehow, were all half-professions, and his allusions to his work and circumstances left something dimly ambiguous in the background. He was modest and proud, and never spoke of his domestic matters. He was evidently poor; yet he must have had some slender independence, since he could afford to make so merry over the fact that his culture of ideal beauty had never brought him a penny. His poverty, I supposed, was his motive for neither inviting me to his lodging nor mentioning its whereabouts. We met either in some public place or at my hotel, where I entertained him as freely as I might without appearing to be prompted by charity. He seemed always hungry, and this was his nearest approach to human grossness. I made a point of asking no impertinent questions, but, each time we met, I ventured to make some respectful allusion to the *magnum opus*, to inquire, as it were, as to its health and progress. "We are getting on, with the Lord's help," he would

say, with a grave smile. "We are doing well. You see, I have the grand advantage that I lose no time. These hours I spend with you are pure profit. They are *suggestive*! Just as the truly religious soul is always at worship, the genuine artist is always in labour. He takes his property wherever he finds it, and learns some precious secret from every object that stands up in the light. If you but knew the rapture of observation! I gather with every glance some hint for light, for colour, or relief! When I get home, I pour out my treasures into the lap of my Madonna. Oh, I am not idle! *Nulla dies sine linea*."

I was introduced in Florence to an American lady whose drawing-room had long formed an attractive place of reunion for the foreign residents. She lived on a fourth floor, and she was not rich; but she offered her visitors very good tea, little cakes at option, and conversation not quite to match. Her conversation had mainly an æsthetic flavour, for Mrs. Coventry was famously "artistic." Her apartment was a sort of Pitti Palace *au petit pied*. She possessed "early masters" by the dozen—a cluster of Peruginos in her dining-room, a Giotto in her boudoir, an Andrea del Sarto over her drawing-room chimney-piece. Surrounded by these treasures, and by innumerable bronzes, mosaics, majolica dishes, and little worm-eaten diptychs covered with angular saints on gilded backgrounds, our hostess enjoyed the dignity of a sort of high-priestess of the arts. She always wore on her bosom a huge miniature copy of the Madonna della Seggiola. Gaining her ear quietly one evening, I asked her whether she knew that remarkable man, Mr. Theobald.

"Know him!" she exclaimed; "know poor Theobald! All Florence knows him, his flame-coloured locks, his black velvet coat, his interminable harangues on the beautiful, and his wondrous Madonna that mortal eye has never seen, and that mortal patience has quite given up expecting."

“Really,” I cried, “you don’t believe in his Madonna?”

“My dear ingenuous youth,” rejoined my shrewd friend, “has he made a convert of you? Well, we all believed in him once; he came down upon Florence and took the town by storm. Another Raphael, at the very least, had been born among men, and the poor dear United States were to have the credit of him. Hadn’t he the very hair of Raphael flowing down on his shoulders? The hair, alas, but not the head! We swallowed him whole, however; we hung upon his lips and proclaimed his genius on the house-tops. The women were all dying to sit to him for their portraits and be made immortal, like Leonardo’s Joconde. We decided that his manner was a good deal like Leonardo’s—mysterious, and inscrutable, and fascinating. Mysterious it certainly was; mystery was the beginning and the end of it. The months passed by, and the miracle hung fire; our master never produced his masterpiece. He passed hours in the galleries and churches, posturing, musing, and gazing; he talked more than ever about the beautiful, but he never put brush to canvas. We had all subscribed, as it were, to the great performance; but as it never came off, people began to ask for their money again. I was one of the last of the faithful; I carried devotion so far as to sit to him for my head. If you could have seen the horrible creature he made of me, you would admit that even a woman with no more vanity than will tie her bonnet straight must have cooled off then. The man didn’t know the very alphabet of drawing! His strong point, he intimated, was his sentiment; but is it a consolation, when one has been painted a fright, to know it has been done with peculiar gusto? One by one, I confess, we fell away from the faith, and Mr. Theobald didn’t lift his little finger to preserve us. At the first hint that we were tired of waiting, and that we should like the show to begin, he was off in a huff. ‘Great work requires time, contem-

plation, privacy, mystery ! O ye of little faith !' We answered that we didn't insist on a great work ; that the five-act tragedy might come at his convenience ; that we merely asked for something to keep us from yawning, some inexpensive little *lever de rideau*. Hereupon the poor man took his stand as a genius misconceived and persecuted, an *âme méconnue*, and washed his hands of us from that hour ! No, I believe he does me the honour to consider me the head and front of the conspiracy formed to nip his glory in the bud—a bud that has taken twenty years to blossom. Ask him if he knows me, and he will tell you I am a horribly ugly old woman, who has vowed his destruction because he won't paint her portrait as a pendant to Titian's Flora. I fancy that since then he has had none but chance followers, innocent strangers like yourself, who have taken him at his word. The mountain is still in labour ; I have not heard that the mouse has been born. I pass him once in a while in the galleries, and he fixes his great dark eyes on me with a sublimity of indifference, as if I were a bad copy of a Sassoferrato ! It is a long time ago now that I heard that he was making studies for a Madonna who was to be a *résumé* of all the other Madonnas of the Italian school—like that antique Venus who borrowed a nose from one great image and an ankle from another. It's certainly a masterly idea. The parts may be fine, but when I think of my unhappy portrait I tremble for the whole. He has communicated this striking idea under the pledge of solemn secrecy to fifty chosen spirits, to every one he has ever been able to button-hole for five minutes. I suppose he wants to get an order for it, and he is not to blame ; for Heaven knows how he lives. I see by your blush," my hostess frankly continued, "that you have been honoured with his confidence. You needn't be ashamed, my dear young man ; a man of your age is none the worse for a certain generous credulity. Only allow me to give you a word

of advice : keep your credulity out of your pockets ! Don't pay for the picture till it's delivered. You have not been treated to a peep at it, I imagine ! No more have your fifty predecessors in the faith. There are people who doubt whether there is any picture to be seen. I fancy, myself, that if one were to get into his studio, one would find something very like the picture in that tale of Balzac's—a mere mass of incoherent scratches and daubs, a jumble of dead paint !”

I listened to this pungent recital in silent wonder. It had a painfully plausible sound, and was not inconsistent with certain shy suspicions of my own. My hostess was not only a clever woman, but presumably a generous one. I determined to let my judgment wait upon events. Possibly she was right ; but if she was wrong, she was cruelly wrong ! Her version of my friend's eccentricities made me impatient to see him again and examine him in the light of public opinion. On our next meeting I immediately asked him if he knew Mrs. Coventry. He laid his hand on my arm and gave me a sad smile. “Has she taxed *your* gallantry at last ?” he asked. “She's a foolish woman. She's frivolous and heartless, and she pretends to be serious and kind. She prattles about Giotto's second manner and Vittoria Colonna's liaison with ‘Michael’—one would think that Michael lived across the way and was expected in to take a hand at whist—but she knows as little about art, and about the conditions of production, as I know about Buddhism. She profanes sacred words,” he added more vehemently, after a pause. “She cares for you only as some one to hand teacups in that horrible mendacious little parlour of hers, with its trumpery Peruginos ! If you can't dash off a new picture every three days, and let her hand it round among her guests, she tells them in plain English that you are an impostor !”

This attempt of mine to test Mrs. Coventry's accuracy was made in the course of a late afternoon walk to the

quiet old church of San Miniato, on one of the hill-tops which directly overlook the city, from whose gates you are guided to it by a stony and cypress-bordered walk, which seems a very fitting avenue to a shrine. No spot is more propitious to lingering repose¹ than the broad terrace in front of the church, where, lounging against the parapet, you may glance in slow alternation from the black and yellow marbles of the church façade, seamed and cracked with time and wind-sown with a tender flora of its own, down to the full domes and slender towers of Florence and over to the blue sweep of the wide-mouthed cup of mountains into whose hollow the little treasure city has been dropped. I had proposed, as a diversion from the painful memories evoked by Mrs. Coventry's name, that Theobald should go with me the next evening to the opera, where some rarely-played work was to be given. He declined, as I half expected, for I observed that he regularly kept his evenings in reserve, and never alluded to his manner of passing them. "You have reminded me before," I said, smiling, "of that charming speech of the Florentine painter in Alfred de Musset's '*Lorenzaccio*': '*I do no harm to any one. I pass my days in my studio. On Sunday I go to the Annunziata or to Santa Maria; the monks think I have a voice; they dress me in a white gown and a red cap, and I take a share in the choruses; sometimes I do a little solo: these are the only times I go into public. In the evening, I visit my sweetheart; when the night is fine, we pass it on her balcony.*' I don't know whether you have a sweetheart, or whether she has a balcony. But if you are so happy, it's certainly better than trying to find a charm in a third-rate prima donna."

He made no immediate response, but at last he turned to me solemnly. "Can you look upon a beautiful woman with reverent eyes?"

"Really," I said, "I don't pretend to be sheepish,

24 THE MADONNA OF THE FUTURE.

but I should be sorry to think I was impudent." And I asked him what in the world he meant. When at last I had assured him that I could undertake to temper admiration with respect, he informed me, with an air of religious mystery, that it was in his power to introduce me to the most beautiful woman in Italy—"A beauty with a soul!"

"Upon my word," I cried, "you are extremely fortunate, and that is a most attractive description."

"This woman's beauty," he went on, "is a lesson, a morality, a poem! It's my daily study."

Of course, after this, I lost no time in reminding him of what, before we parted, had taken the shape of a promise. "I feel somehow," he had said, "as if it were a sort of violation of that privacy in which I have always contemplated her beauty. This is friendship, my friend. No hint of her existence has ever fallen from my lips. But with too great a familiarity we are apt to lose a sense of the real value of things, and you perhaps will throw some new light upon it and offer a fresher interpretation."

We went accordingly by appointment to a certain ancient house in the heart of Florence—the precinct of the Mercato Vecchio—and climbed a dark, steep staircase, to the very summit of the edifice. Theobald's beauty seemed as loftily exalted above the line of common vision as his artistic ideal was lifted above the usual practice of men. He passed without knocking into the dark vestibule of a small apartment, and, flinging open an inner door, ushered me into a small saloon. The room seemed mean and sombre, though I caught a glimpse of white curtains swaying gently at an open window. At a table, near a lamp, sat a woman dressed in black, working at a piece of embroidery. As Theobald entered she looked up calmly, with a smile; but seeing me she made a movement of surprise, and rose with a kind of stately grace. Theobald stepped forward, took her hand and kissed it, with an indescribable air of

immemorial usage. As he bent his head she looked at me askance, and I thought she blushed.

"Behold the Serafina!" said Theobald, frankly, waving me forward. "This is a friend, and a lover of the arts," he added, introducing me. I received a smile, a curtsy, and a request to be seated.

The most beautiful woman in Italy was a person of a generous Italian type and of a great simplicity of demeanour. Seated again at her lamp, with her embroidery, she seemed to have nothing whatever to say. Theobald, bending towards her in a sort of Platonic ecstasy, asked her a dozen paternally tender questions as to her health, her state of mind, her occupations, and the progress of her embroidery, which he examined minutely and summoned me to admire. It was some portion of an ecclesiastical vestment—yellow satin wrought with an elaborate design of silver and gold. She made answer in a full rich voice, but with a brevity which I hesitated whether to attribute to native reserve or to the profane constraint of my presence. She had been that morning to confession; she had also been to market, and had bought a chicken for dinner. She felt very happy; she had nothing to complain of, except that the people for whom she was making her vestment, and who furnished her materials, should be willing to put such rotten silver thread into the garment, as one might say, of the Lord. From time to time, as she took her slow stitches, she raised her eyes and covered me with a glance which seemed at first to denote a placid curiosity, but in which, as I saw it repeated, I thought I perceived the dim glimmer of an attempt to establish an understanding with me at the expense of our companion. Meanwhile, as mindful as possible of Theobald's injunction of reverence, I considered the lady's personal claims to the fine compliment he had paid her.

That she was indeed a beautiful woman I perceived, after recovering from the surprise of finding her without

the freshness of youth. Her beauty was of a sort which, in losing youth, loses little of its essential charm, expressed for the most part as it was in form and structure, and, as Theobald would have said, in "composition." She was broad and ample, low-browed and large-eyed, dark and pale. Her thick brown hair hung low beside her cheek and ear, and seemed to drape her head with a covering as chaste and formal as the veil of a nun. The poise and carriage of her head were admirably free and noble, and they were the more effective that their freedom was at moments discreetly corrected by a little sanctimonious droop, which harmonised admirably with the level gaze of her dark and quiet eye. A strong, serene, physical nature, and the placid temper which comes of no nerves and no troubles, seemed this lady's comfortable portion. She was dressed in plain dull black, save for a sort of dark blue kerchief which was folded across her bosom and exposed a glimpse of her massive throat. Over this kerchief was suspended a little silver cross. I admired her greatly, and yet with a large reserve. A certain mild intellectual apathy belonged properly to her type of beauty, and had always seemed to round and enrich it; but this *bourgeoise* Egeria, if I viewed her right, betrayed a rather vulgar stagnation of mind. There might have been once a dim spiritual light in her face; but it had long since begun to wane. And furthermore, in plain prose, she was growing stout. My disappointment amounted very nearly to complete disenchantment when Theobald, as if to facilitate my covert inspection, declaring that the lamp was very dim, and that she would ruin her eyes without more light, rose and fetched a couple of candles from the mantel-piece, which he placed lighted on the table. In this brighter illumination I perceived that our hostess was decidedly an elderly woman. She was neither haggard, nor worn, nor gray; she was simply coarse. The "soul" which Theobald had promised seemed scarcely

worth making such a point of; it was no deeper mystery than a sort of matronly mildness of lip and brow. I should have been ready even to declare that that sanctified bend of the head was nothing more than the trick of a person constantly working at embroidery. It occurred to me even that it was a trick of a less innocent sort; for, in spite of the mellow quietude of her wits, this stately needlewoman dropped a hint that she took the situation rather less seriously than her friend. When he rose to light the candles she looked across at me with a quick, intelligent smile, and tapped her forehead with her forefinger; then, as from a sudden feeling of compassionate loyalty to poor Theobald, I preserved a blank face, she gave a little shrug and resumed her work.

What was the relation of this singular couple? Was he the most ardent of friends or the most reverent of lovers? Did she regard him as an eccentric swain, whose benevolent admiration of her beauty she was not ill pleased to humour at this small cost of having him climb into her little parlour and gossip of summer nights? With her decent and sombre dress, her simple gravity, and that fine piece of priestly needlework, she looked like some pious lay-member of a sisterhood, living by special permission outside her convent walls. Or was she maintained here aloft by her friend in comfortable leisure, so that he might have before him the perfect, eternal type, uncorrupted and untarnished by the struggle for existence? Her shapely hands, I observed, were very fair and white; they lacked the traces of what is called honest toil.

"And the pictures, how do they come on?" she asked of Theobald, after a long pause.

"Finely, finely! I have here a friend whose sympathy and encouragement give me new faith and ardour."

Our hostess turned to me, gazed at me a moment rather inscrutably, and then tapping her forehead with

the gesture she had used a minute before, "He has a magnificent genius!" she said, with perfect gravity.

"I am inclined to think so," I answered, with a smile.

"Eh, why do you smile?" she cried. "If you doubt it, you must see the *bambino*!" And she took the lamp and conducted me to the other side of the room, where on the wall, in a plain black frame, hung a large drawing in red chalk. Beneath it was fastened a little bowl for holy water. The drawing represented a very young child, entirely naked, half nestling back against his mother's gown, but with his two little arms outstretched, as if in the act of benediction. It was executed with singular freedom and power, and yet seemed vivid with the sacred bloom of infancy. A sort of dimpled elegance and grace, mingled with its boldness, recalled the touch of Correggio. "That's what he can do!" said my hostess. "It's the blessed little boy whom I lost. It's his very image, and the Signor Teobaldo gave it me as a gift. He has given me many things besides!"

I looked at the picture for some time and admired it immensely. Turning back to Theobald I assured him that if it were hung among the drawings in the Uffizi and labelled with a glorious name it would hold its own. My praise seemed to give him extreme pleasure; he pressed my hands, and his eyes filled with tears. It moved him apparently with the desire to expatiate on the history of the drawing, for he rose and made his adieux to our companion, kissing her hand with the same mild ardour as before. It occurred to me that the offer of a similar piece of gallantry on my own part might help me to know what manner of woman she was. When she perceived my intention she withdrew her hand, dropped her eyes solemnly, and made me a severe curtsy. Theobald took my arm and led me rapidly into the street.

"And what do you think of the divine Serafina?" he cried with fervour.

"It is certainly an excellent style of good looks!" I answered.

He eyed me an instant askance, and then seemed hurried along by the current of remembrance. "You should have seen the mother and the child together, seen them as I first saw them—the mother with her head draped in a shawl, a divine trouble in her face, and the bambino pressed to her bosom. You would have said, I think, that Raphael had found his match in common chance. I was coming in, one summer night, from a long walk in the country, when I met this apparition at the city gate. The woman held out her hand. I hardly knew whether to say, 'What do you want?' or to fall down and worship. She asked for a little money. I saw that she was beautiful and pale; she might have stepped out of the stable of Bethlehem! I gave her money and helped her on her way into the town. I had guessed her story. She, too, was a maiden mother, and she had been turned out into the world in her shame. I felt in all my pulses that here was my subject marvellously realised. I felt like one of the old monkish artists who had had a vision. I rescued the poor creatures, cherished them, watched them as I would have done some precious work of art, some lovely fragment of fresco discovered in a mouldering cloister. In a month—as if to deepen and sanctify the sadness and sweetness of it all—the poor little child died. When she felt that he was going she held him up to me for ten minutes, and I made that sketch. You saw a feverish haste in it, I suppose; I wanted to spare the poor little mortal the pain of his position. After that I doubly valued the mother. She is the simplest, sweetest, most natural creature that ever bloomed in this brave old land of Italy. She lives in the memory of her child, in her gratitude for the scanty kindness I have been able to show her, and in her simple religion! She is not even conscious of her beauty; my admiration has never made her vain. Heaven knows that I have made no secret of

it. You must have observed the singular transparency of her expression, the lovely modesty of her glance. And was there ever such a truly virginal brow, such a natural classic elegance in the wave of the hair and the arch of the forehead? I have studied her; I may say I know her. I have absorbed her little by little; my mind is stamped and imbued, and I have determined now to clinch the impression; I shall at last invite her to sit for me!"

"At last—at last?" I repeated, in much amazement. "Do you mean that she has never done so yet?"

"I have not really had—a—a sitting," said Theobald, speaking very slowly. "I have taken notes, you know; I have got my grand fundamental impression. That's the great thing! But I have not actually had her as a model, posed and draped and lighted, before my easel."

What had become for the moment of my perception and my tact I am at a loss to say; in their absence I was unable to repress a headlong exclamation. I was destined to regret it. We had stopped at a turning, beneath a lamp. "My poor friend," I exclaimed, laying my hand on his shoulder, "you have *dawdled*! She's an old, old woman—for a Madonna!"

It was as if I had brutally struck him; I shall never forget the long, slow, almost ghastly look of pain, with which he answered me.

"Dawdled?—old, old?" he stammered. "Are you joking?"

"Why, my dear fellow, I suppose you don't take her for a woman of twenty?"

He drew a long breath and leaned against a house, looking at me with questioning, protesting, reproachful eyes. At last, starting forward, and grasping my arm—"Answer me solemnly: does she seem to you truly old? Is she wrinkled, is she faded, am I blind?"

Then at last I understood the immensity of his illusion; how, one by one, the noiseless years had ebbed away and

left him brooding in charmed inaction, for ever preparing for a work for ever deferred. It seemed to me almost a kindness now to tell him the plain truth. "I should be sorry to say you are blind," I answered, "but I think you are deceived. You have lost time in effortless contemplation. Your friend was once young and fresh and virginal; but, I protest, that was some years ago. Still, she has *de beaux restes*. By all means make her sit for you!" I broke down; his face was too horribly reproachful.

He took off his hat and stood passing his handkerchief mechanically over his forehead. "*De beaux restes*? I thank you for sparing me the plain English. I must make up my Madonna out of *de beaux restes*! What a masterpiece she will be! Old—old! Old—old!" he murmured.

"Never mind her age," I cried, revolted at what I had done, "never mind my impression of her! You have your memory, your notes, your genius. Finish your picture in a month. I pronounce it beforehand a masterpiece, and I hereby offer you for it any sum you may choose to ask."

He stared, but he seemed scarcely to understand me. "Old—old!" he kept stupidly repeating. "If she is old, what am I? If her beauty has faded, where—where is my strength? Has life been a dream? Have I worshipped too long—have I loved too well?" The charm, in truth, was broken. That the chord of illusion should have snapped at my light accidental touch showed how it had been weakened by excessive tension. The poor fellow's sense of wasted time, of vanished opportunity, seemed to roll in upon his soul in waves of darkness. He suddenly dropped his head and burst into tears.

I led him homeward with all possible tenderness, but I attempted neither to check his grief, to restore his equanimity, nor to unsay the hard truth. When we

reached my hotel I tried to induce him to come in. "We will drink a glass of wine," I said, smiling, "to the completion of the Madonna."

With a violent effort he held up his head, mused for a moment with a formidably sombre frown, and then giving me his hand, "I will finish it," he cried, "in a month! No, in a fortnight! After all, I have it *here!*" And he tapped his forehead. "Of course she's old! She can afford to have it said of her—a woman who has made twenty years pass like a twelvemonth! Old—old! Why, sir, she shall be eternal!"

I wished to see him safely to his own door, but he waved me back and walked away with an air of resolution, whistling and swinging his cane. I waited a moment, and then followed him at a distance, and saw him proceed to cross the Santa Trinità Bridge. When he reached the middle he suddenly paused, as if his strength had deserted him, and leaned upon the parapet gazing over into the river. I was careful to keep him in sight; I confess that I passed ten very nervous minutes. He recovered himself at last, and went his way, slowly and with hanging head.

That I had really startled poor Theobald into a bolder use of his long-garnered stores of knowledge and taste, into the vulgar effort and hazard of production, seemed at first reason enough for his continued silence and absence; but as day followed day without his either calling or sending me a line, and without my meeting him in his customary haunts, in the galleries, in the Chapel at San Lorenzo, or strolling between the Arno side and the great hedge-screen of verdure which, along the drive of the Cascine, throws the fair occupants of barouche and phaeton into such becoming relief—as for more than a week I got neither tidings nor sight of him, I began to fear that I had fatally offended him, and that, instead of giving a wholesome impetus to his talent, I had brutally paralysed it. I had a wretched suspicion that I had

made him ill. My stay at Florence was drawing to a close, and it was important that, before resuming my journey, I should assure myself of the truth. Theobald, to the last, had kept his lodging a mystery, and I was altogether at a loss where to look for him. The simplest course was to make inquiry of the beauty of the Mercato Vecchio, and I confess that unsatisfied curiosity as to the lady herself counselled it as well. Perhaps I had done her injustice, and she was as immortally fresh and fair as he conceived her. I was, at any rate, anxious to behold once more the ripe enchantress who had made twenty years pass as a twelvemonth. I repaired accordingly, one morning, to her abode, climbed the interminable staircase, and reached her door. It stood ajar, and as I hesitated whether to enter, a little serving-maid came clattering out with an empty kettle, as if she had just performed some savoury errand. The inner door, too, was open; so I crossed the little vestibule and entered the room in which I had formerly been received. It had not its evening aspect. The table, or one end of it, was spread for a late breakfast, and before it sat a gentleman—an individual, at least, of the male sex—doing execution upon a beefsteak and onions, and a bottle of wine. At his elbow, in friendly proximity, was placed the lady of the house. Her attitude, as I entered, was not that of an enchantress. With one hand she held in her lap a plate of smoking macaroni; with the other she had lifted high in air one of the pendulous filaments of this succulent compound, and was in the act of slipping it gently down her throat. On the uncovered end of the table, facing her companion, were ranged half a dozen small statuettes, of some snuff-coloured substance resembling terra-cotta. He, brandishing his knife with ardour, was apparently descanting on their merits.

Evidently I darkened the door. My hostess dropped her macaroni—into her mouth, and rose hastily with a harsh exclamation and a flushed face. I immediately

perceived that the Signora Serafina's secret was even better worth knowing than I had supposed, and that the way to learn it was to take it for granted. I summoned my best Italian, I smiled and bowed and apologised for my intrusion; and in a moment, whether or no I had dispelled the lady's irritation, I had at least stimulated her prudence. I was welcome, she said; I must take a seat. This was another friend of hers—also an artist, she declared with a smile which was almost amiable. Her companion wiped his moustache and bowed with great civility. I saw at a glance that he was equal to the situation. He was presumably the author of the statuettes on the table, and he knew a money-spending *forestière* when he saw one. He was a small wiry man, with a clever, impudent, tossed-up nose, a sharp little black eye, and waxed ends to his moustache. On the side of his head he wore jauntily a little crimson velvet smoking-cap, and I observed that his feet were encased in brilliant slippers. On Serafina's remarking with dignity that I was the friend of Mr. Theobald, he broke out into that fantastic French of which certain Italians are so insistently lavish, and declared with fervour that Mr. Theobald was a magnificent genius.

"I am sure I don't know," I answered with a shrug. "If you are in a position to affirm it, you have the advantage of me. I have seen nothing from his hand but the bambino yonder, which certainly is fine."

He declared that the bambino was a masterpiece, a pure Corregio. It was only a pity, he added with a knowing laugh, that the sketch had not been made on some good bit of honeycombed old panel. The stately Serafina hereupon protested that Mr. Theobald was the soul of honour, and that he would never lend himself to a deceit. "I am not a judge of genius," she said, "and I know nothing of pictures. I am but a poor simple widow; but I know that the Signor Teobaldo has the heart of an angel and the virtue of a saint. He is my

benefactor," she added sententiously. The after-glow of the somewhat sinister flush with which she had greeted me still lingered in her cheek, and perhaps did not favour her beauty; I could not but fancy it a wise custom of Theobald's to visit her only by candle-light. She was coarse, and her poor adorer was a poet.

"I have the greatest esteem for him," I said; "it is for this reason that I have been uneasy at not seeing him for ten days. Have you seen him? Is he perhaps ill?"

"Ill! Heaven forbid!" cried Serafina, with genuine vehemence.

Her companion uttered a rapid expletive, and reproached her with not having been to see him. She hesitated a moment; then she simpered the least bit and bridled. "He comes to see me—without reproach! But it would not be the same for me to go to him, though, indeed, you may almost call him a man of holy life."

"He has the greatest admiration for you," I said. "He would have been honoured by your visit."

She looked at me a moment sharply. "More admiration than you. Admit that!" Of course I protested with all the eloquence at my command, and my mysterious hostess then confessed that she had taken no fancy to me on my former visit, and that, Theobald not having returned, she believed I had poisoned his mind against her. "It would be no kindness to the poor gentleman, I can tell you that," she said. "He has come to see me every evening for years. It's a long friendship! No one knows him as well as I."

"I don't pretend to know him or to understand him," I said. "He's a mystery! Nevertheless, he seems to me a little——" And I touched my forehead and waved my hand in the air.

Serafina glanced at her companion a moment, as if for inspiration. He contented himself with shrugging his shoulders as he filled his glass again. The *padrona*

hereupon gave me a more softly insinuating smile than would have seemed likely to bloom on so candid a brow. "It's for that that I love him!" she said. "The world has so little kindness for such persons. It laughs at them, and despises them, and cheats them. He is too good for this wicked life! It's his fancy that he finds a little Paradise up here in my poor apartment. If he thinks so, how can I help it? He has a strange belief—really, I ought to be ashamed to tell you—that I resemble the Blessed Virgin: Heaven forgive me! I let him think what he pleases, so long as it makes him happy. He was very kind to me once, and I am not one that forgets a favour. So I receive him every evening civilly, and ask after his health, and let him look at me on this side and that! For that matter, I may say it without vanity, I was worth looking at once! And he's not always amusing, poor man! He sits sometimes for an hour without speaking a word, or else he talks away, without stopping, on art and nature, and beauty and duty, and fifty fine things that are all so much Latin to me. I beg you to understand that he has never said a word to me that I mightn't decently listen to. He may be a little cracked, but he's one of the blessed saints."

"Eh!" cried the man, "the blessed saints were all a little cracked!"

Serafina, I fancied, left part of her story untold; but she told enough of it to make poor Theobald's own statement seem intensely pathetic in its exalted simplicity. "It's a strange fortune, certainly," she went on, "to have such a friend as this dear man—a friend who is less than a lover and more than a friend." I glanced at her companion, who preserved an impenetrable smile, twisted the end of his moustache, and disposed of a copious mouthful. Was *he* less than a lover? "But what will you have?" Serafina pursued. "In this hard world one must not ask too many questions; one must

take what comes and keep what one gets. I have kept my good friend for twenty years, and I do hope that, at this time of day, signore, you have not come to turn him against me !”

I assured her that I had no such design, and that I should vastly regret disturbing Mr. Theobald's habits or convictions. On the contrary, I was alarmed about him, and I should immediately go in search of him. She gave me his address, and a florid account of her sufferings at his non-appearance. She had not been to him for various reasons ; chiefly because she was afraid of displeasing him, as he had always made such a mystery of his home. “ You might have sent this gentleman !” I ventured to suggest.

“ Ah,” cried the gentleman, “ he admires the Signora Serafina, but he wouldn't admire me.” And then, confidentially, with his finger on his nose, “ He's a purist !”

I was about to withdraw, after having promised that I would inform the Signora Serafina of my friend's condition, when her companion, who had risen from table and girded his loins apparently for the onset, grasped me gently by the arm, and led me before the row of statuettes. “ I perceive by your conversation, signore, that you are a patron of the arts. Allow me to request your honourable attention for these modest products of my own ingenuity. They are brand-new, fresh from my atelier, and have never been exhibited in public. I have brought them here to receive the verdict of this dear lady, who is a good critic, for all she may pretend to the contrary. I am the inventor of this peculiar style of statuette—of subject, manner, material, everything. Touch them, I pray you ; handle them freely—you needn't fear. Delicate as they look, it is impossible they should break ! My various creations have met with great success. They are especially admired by Americans. I have sent them all over Europe—to London, Paris, Vienna ! You may have observed some

little specimens in Paris, on the Boulevard, in a shop of which they constitute the specialty. There is always a crowd about the window. They form a very pleasing ornament for the mantel-shelf of a gay young bachelor, for the boudoir of a pretty woman. You couldn't make a prettier present to a person with whom you wished to exchange a harmless joke. It is not classic art, signore, of course ; but, between ourselves, isn't classic art sometimes rather a bore ? Caricature, burlesque, *la charge*, as the French say, has hitherto been confined to paper, to the pen and pencil. Now, it has been my inspiration to introduce it into statuary. For this purpose I have invented a peculiar plastic compound which you will permit me not to divulge. That's my secret, signore ! It's as light, you perceive, as cork, and yet as firm as alabaster ! I frankly confess that I really pride myself as much on this little stroke of chemical ingenuity as upon the other element of novelty in my creations—my types. What do you say to my types, signore ? The idea is bold ; does it strike you as happy ? Cats and monkeys—monkeys and cats—all human life is there ! Human life, of course, I mean, viewed with the eye of the satirist ! To combine sculpture and satire, signore, has been my unprecedented ambition. I flatter myself that I have not egregiously failed."

As this jaunty Juvenal of the chimney-piece delivered himself of his persuasive allocution, he took up his little groups successively from the table, held them aloft, turned them about, rapped them with his knuckles, and gazed at them lovingly, with his head on one side. They consisted each of a cat and a monkey, fantastically draped, in some preposterously sentimental conjunction. They exhibited a certain sameness of motive, and illustrated chiefly the different phases of what, in delicate terms, may be called gallantry and coquetry ; but they were strikingly clever and expressive, and were at once very perfect cats and monkeys and very natural men and

women. I confess, however, that they failed to amuse me. I was doubtless not in a mood to enjoy them, for they seemed to me peculiarly cynical and vulgar. Their imitative felicity was revolting. As I looked askance at the complacent little artist, brandishing them between finger and thumb and caressing them with an amorous eye, he seemed to me himself little more than an exceptionally intelligent ape. I mustered an admiring grin, however, and he blew another blast. "My figures are studied from life! I have a little menagerie of monkeys whose frolics I contemplate by the hour. As for the cats, one has only to look out of one's back window! Since I have begun to examine these expressive little brutes, I have made many profound observations. Speaking, signore, to a man of imagination, I may say that my little designs are not without a philosophy of their own. Truly, I don't know whether the cats and monkeys imitate us, or whether it's we who imitate them." I congratulated him on his philosophy, and he resumed: "You will do me the honour to admit that I have handled my subjects with delicacy. Eh, it was needed, signore! I have been free, but not too free—eh? Just a hint, you know! You may see as much or as little as you please. These little groups, however, are no measure of my invention. If you will favour me with a call at my studio, I think that you will admit that my combinations are really infinite. I likewise execute figures to command. You have perhaps some little motive—the fruit of your philosophy of life, signore—which you would like to have interpreted. I can promise to work it up to your satisfaction; it shall be as malicious as you please! Allow me to present you with my card, and to remind you that my prices are moderate. Only sixty francs for a little group like that. My statuettes are as durable as bronze—*are perennius*, signore—and, between ourselves, I think they are more amusing!"

As I pocketed his card I glanced at Madonna Serafina, wondering whether she had an eye for contrasts. She had picked up one of the little couples and was tenderly dusting it with a feather broom.

What I had just seen and heard had so deepened my compassionate interest in my deluded friend that I took a summary leave, making my way directly to the house designated by this remarkable woman. It was in an obscure corner of the opposite side of the town, and presented a sombre and squalid appearance. An old woman in the doorway, on my inquiring for Theobald, ushered me in with a mumbled blessing and an expression of relief at the poor gentleman having a friend. His lodging seemed to consist of a single room at the top of the house. On getting no answer to my knock, I opened the door, supposing that he was absent, so that it gave me a certain shock to find him sitting there helpless and dumb. He was seated near the single window, facing an easel which supported a large canvas. On my entering he looked up at me blankly, without changing his position, which was that of absolute lassitude and dejection, his arms loosely folded, his legs stretched before him, his head hanging on his breast. Advancing into the room I perceived that his face vividly corresponded with his attitude. He was pale, haggard, and unshaven, and his dull and sunken eye gazed at me without a spark of recognition. I had been afraid that he would greet me with fierce reproaches, as the cruelly officious patron who had turned his contentment to bitterness, and I was relieved to find that my appearance awakened no visible resentment. "Don't you know me?" I asked, as I put out my hand. "Have you already forgotten me?"

He made no response, kept his position stupidly, and left me staring about the room. It spoke most plaintively for itself. Shabby, sordid, naked, it contained, beyond the wretched bed, but the scantiest provision for

personal comfort. It was bedroom at once and studio—a grim ghost of a studio. A few dusty casts and prints on the walls, three or four old canvases turned face inward, and a rusty-looking colour-box, formed, with the easel at the window, the sum of its appurtenances. The place savoured horribly of poverty. Its only wealth was the picture on the easel, presumably the famous Madonna. Averted as this was from the door, I was unable to see its face; but at last, sickened by the vacant misery of the spot, I passed behind Theobald, eagerly and tenderly. I can hardly say that I was surprised at what I found—a canvas that was a mere dead blank, cracked and discoloured by time. This was his immortal work! Though not surprised, I confess I was powerfully moved, and I think that for five minutes I could not have trusted myself to speak. At last my silent nearness affected him; he stirred and turned, and then rose and looked at me with a slowly kindling eye. I murmured some kind ineffective nothings about his being ill and needing advice and care, but he seemed absorbed in the effort to recall distinctly what had last passed between us. “You were right,” he said, with a pitiful smile, “I am a dawdler! I am a failure! I shall do nothing more in this world. You opened my eyes; and, though the truth is bitter, I bear you no grudge. Amen! I have been sitting here for a week, face to face with the truth, with the past, with my weakness and poverty and nullity. I shall never touch a brush! I believe I have neither eaten nor slept. Look at that canvas!” he went on, as I relieved my emotion in an urgent request that he would come home with me and dine. “That was to have contained my masterpiece! Isn’t it a promising foundation? The elements of it are all *here*.” And he tapped his forehead with that mystic confidence which had marked the gesture before. “If I could only transpose them into some brain that has the hand, the will! Since I have been sitting here taking stock of my intellects, I have come

to believe that I have the material for a hundred masterpieces. But my hand is paralysed now, and they will never be painted. I never began! I waited and waited to be worthier to begin, and wasted my life in preparation. While I fancied my creation was growing it was dying. I have taken it all too hard! Michael Angelo didn't, when he went at the Lorenzo! He did his best at a venture, and his venture is immortal. *That's mine!*" And he pointed with a gesture I shall never forget at the empty canvas. "I suppose we are a genus by ourselves in the providential scheme—we talents that can't act, that can't do nor dare! We take it out in talk, in plans and promises, in study, in visions! But our visions, let me tell you," he cried, with a toss of his head, "have a way of being brilliant, and a man has not lived in vain who has seen the things I have seen! Of course you will not believe in them when that bit of worm-eaten cloth is all I have to show for them; but to convince you, to enchant and astound the world, I need only the hand of Raphael. His brain I already have. A pity, you will say, that I haven't his modesty! Ah, let me boast and babble now; it's all I have left! I am the half of a genius! Where in the wide world is my other half? Lodged perhaps in the vulgar soul, the cunning, ready fingers of some dull copyist or some trivial artisan, who turns out by the dozen his easy prodigies of touch! But it's not for me to sneer at him; he at least does something. He's not a dawdler! Well for me if I had been vulgar and clever and reckless, if I could have shut my eyes and taken my leap."

What to say to the poor fellow, what to do for him, seemed hard to determine; I chiefly felt that I must break the spell of his present inaction, and remove him from the haunted atmosphere of the little room it was such a cruel irony to call a studio. I cannot say I persuaded him to come out with me; he simply suffered himself to be led, and when we began to walk in the

open air I was able to appreciate his pitifully weakened condition. Nevertheless, he seemed in a certain way to revive, and murmured at last that he should like to go to the Pitti Gallery. I shall never forget our melancholy stroll through those gorgeous halls, every picture on whose walls seemed, even to my own sympathetic vision, to glow with a sort of insolent renewal of strength and lustre. The eyes and lips of the great portraits appeared to smile in ineffable scorn of the dejected pretender who had dreamed of competing with their triumphant authors; the celestial candour, even, of the Madonna of the Chair, as we paused in perfect silence before her, was tinged with the sinister irony of the women of Leonardo. Perfect silence, indeed, marked our whole progress—the silence of a deep farewell; for I felt in all my pulses, as Theobald, leaning on my arm, dragged one heavy foot after the other, that he was looking his last. When we came out he was so exhausted that instead of taking him to my hotel to dine, I called a carriage and drove him straight to his own poor lodging. He had sunk into an extraordinary lethargy; he lay back in the carriage, with his eyes closed, as pale as death, his faint breathing interrupted at intervals by a sudden gasp, like a smothered sob or a vain attempt to speak. With the help of the old woman who had admitted me before, and who emerged from a dark back court, I contrived to lead him up the long steep staircase and lay him on his wretched bed. To her I gave him in charge, while I prepared in all haste to seek a physician. But she followed me out of the room with a pitiful clasping of her hands.

"Poor, dear, blessed gentleman," she murmured;—"is he dying?"

"Possibly. How long has he been thus?"

"Since a certain night he passed ten days ago. I came up in the morning to make his poor bed, and found him sitting up in his clothes before that great canvas he keeps there, ~~Poor, dear, strange man, he says~~

his prayers to it ! He had not been to bed, nor since then, properly ! What has happened to him ? Has he found out about the Serafina ?" she whispered, with a glittering eye and a toothless grin.

"Prove at least that one old woman can be faithful," I said, "and watch him well till I come back." My return was delayed, through the absence of the English physician, who was away on a round of visits, and whom I vainly pursued from house to house before I overtook him. I brought him to Theobald's bedside none too soon. A violent fever had seized our patient, and the case was evidently grave. A couple of hours later I knew that he had brain fever. From this moment I was with him constantly ; but I am far from wishing to describe his illness. Excessively painful to witness, it was happily brief. Life burned out in delirium. One night in particular that I passed at his pillow, listening to his wild snatches of regret, of aspiration, of rapture and awe at the phantasmal pictures with which his brain seemed to swarm, comes back to my memory now like some stray page from a lost masterpiece of tragedy. Before a week was over we had buried him in the little Protestant cemetery on the way to Fiesole. The Signora Serafina, whom I had caused to be informed of his illness, had come in person, I was told, to inquire about its progress ; but she was absent from his funeral, which was attended by but a scanty concourse of mourners. Half a dozen old Florentine sojourners, in spite of the prolonged estrangement which had preceded his death, had felt the kindly impulse to honour his grave. Among them was my friend Mrs. Coventry, whom I found, on my departure, waiting in her carriage at the gate of the cemetery.

"Well," she said, relieving at last with a significant smile the solemnity of our immediate greeting, "and the great Madonna ? Have you seen her, after all ?"

"I have seen her," I said ; "she is mine—by bequest. But I shall never show her to you."

"And why not, pray?"

"My dear Mrs. Coventry, you would not understand her!"

"Upon my word, you are polite."

"Excuse me; I am sad and vexed and bitter." And with reprehensible rudeness I marched away. I was excessively impatient to leave Florence; my friend's dark spirit seemed diffused through all things. I had packed my trunk to start for Rome that night, and meanwhile, to beguile my unrest, I aimlessly paced the streets. Chance led me at last to the church of San Lorenzo. Remembering poor Theobald's phrase about Michael Angelo—"He did his best at a venture"—I went in and turned my steps to the chapel of the tombs. Viewing in sadness the sadness of its immortal treasures, I fancied, while I stood there, that they needed no ampler commentary than these simple words. As I passed through the church again to leave it, a woman, turning away from one of the side altars, met me face to face. The black shawl depending from her head draped picturesquely the handsome visage of Madonna Serafina. She stopped as she recognised me, and I saw that she wished to speak. Her eye was bright, and her ample bosom heaved in a way that seemed to portend a certain sharpness of reproach. But the expression of my own face, apparently, drew the sting from her resentment, and she addressed me in a tone in which bitterness was tempered by a sort of dogged resignation. "I know it was you, now, that separated us," she said. "It was a pity he ever brought you to see me! Of course, you couldn't think of me as he did. Well, the Lord gave him, the Lord has taken him. I have just paid for a nine days' mass for his soul. And I can tell you this, signore—I never deceived him. Who put it into his head that I was made to live on holy thoughts and fine phrases? It was his own fancy, and it pleased him to think so.—Did he suffer much?" she added more softly, after a pause.

"His sufferings were great, but they were short."

"And did he speak of me?" She had hesitated and dropped her eyes; she raised them with her question, and revealed in their sombre stillness a gleam of feminine confidence which, for the moment, revived and illumined her beauty. Poor Theobald! Whatever name he had given his passion, it was still her fine eyes that had charmed him.

"Be contented, madam," I answered, gravely.

She dropped her eyes again and was silent. Then exhaling a full rich sigh, as she gathered her shawl together—"He was a magnificent genius!"

I bowed, and we separated.

Passing through a narrow side street on my way back to my hotel, I perceived above a doorway a sign which it seemed to me I had read before. I suddenly remembered that it was identical with the superscription of a card that I had carried for an hour in my waistcoat pocket. On the threshold stood the ingenious artist whose claims to public favour were thus distinctly signalled, smoking a pipe in the evening air, and giving the finishing polish with a bit of rag to one of his inimitable "combinations." I caught the expressive curl of a couple of tails. He recognised me, removed his little red cap with a most obsequious bow, and motioned me to enter his studio. I returned his salute and passed on, vexed with the apparition. For a week afterwards, whenever I was seized among the ruins of triumphant Rome with some peculiarly poignant memory of Theobald's transcendent illusions and deplorable failure, I seemed to hear a fantastic, impertinent murmur, "Cats and monkeys, monkeys and cats; all human life is there!"

A BUNDLE OF LETTERS

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A BUNDLE OF LETTERS.

I.

FROM MISS MIRANDA HOPE, IN PARIS, TO MRS.
ABRAHAM C. HOPE, AT BANGOR, MAINE.

September 5th, 1879.

MY DEAR MOTHER—I have kept you posted as far as Tuesday week last, and, although my letter will not have reached you yet, I will begin another before my news accumulates too much. I am glad you show my letters round in the family, for I like them all to know what I am doing, and I can't write to every one, though I try to answer all reasonable expectations. But there are a great many unreasonable ones, as I suppose you know—not yours, dear mother, for I am bound to say that you never required of me more than was natural. You see you are reaping your reward: I write to you before I write to any one else.

There is one thing, I hope—that you don't show any of my letters to William Platt. If he wants to see any of my letters, he knows the right way to go to work. I wouldn't have him see one of these letters, written for circulation in the family, for anything in the world. If he wants one for himself, he has got to write to me first.

Let him write to me first, and then I will see about answering him. You can show him this if you like ; but if you show him anything more, I will never write to you again.

I told you in my last about my farewell to England, my crossing the Channel, and my first impressions of Paris. I have thought a great deal about that lovely England since I left it, and all the famous historic scenes I visited ; but I have come to the conclusion that it is not a country in which I should care to reside. The position of woman does not seem to me at all satisfactory, and that is a point, you know, on which I feel very strongly. It seems to me that in England they play a very faded-out part, and those with whom I conversed had a kind of depressed and humiliated tone ; a little dull, tame look, as if they were used to being snubbed and bullied, which made me want to give them a good shaking. There are a great many people—and a great many things, too—over here that I should like to perform that operation upon. I should like to shake the starch out of some of them, and the dust out of the others. I know fifty girls in Bangor that come much more up to my notion of the stand a truly noble woman should take, than those young ladies in England. But they had a most lovely way of speaking (in England), and the men are *remarkably handsome*. (You can show this to William Platt, if you like.)

I gave you my first impressions of Paris, which quite came up to my expectations, much as I had heard and read about it. The objects of interest are extremely numerous, and the climate is remarkably cheerful and sunny. I should say the position of woman here was considerably higher, though by no means coming up to the American standard. The manners of the people are in some respects extremely peculiar, and I feel at last that I am indeed in *foreign parts*. It is, however, a truly elegant city (very superior to New York), and I

have spent a great deal of time in visiting the various monuments and palaces. I won't give you an account of all my wanderings, though I have been most indefatigable; for I am keeping, as I told you before, a most *exhaustive* journal, which I will allow you the *privilege* of reading on my return to Bangor. I am getting on remarkably well, and I must say I am sometimes surprised at my universal good fortune. It only shows what a little energy and common-sense will accomplish. I have discovered none of these objections to a young lady travelling in Europe by herself of which we heard so much before I left, and I don't expect I ever shall, for I certainly don't mean to look for them. I know what I want, and I always manage to get it.

I have received a great deal of politeness—some of it really most pressing, and I have experienced no drawbacks whatever. I have made a great many pleasant acquaintances in travelling round (both ladies and gentlemen), and had a great many most interesting talks. I have collected a great deal of information, for which I refer you to my journal. I assure you my journal is going to be a splendid thing. I do just exactly as I do in Bangor, and I find I do perfectly right; and at any rate, I don't care if I don't. I didn't come to Europe to lead a merely conventional life; I could do that at Bangor. You know I never *would* do it at Bangor, so it isn't likely I am going to make myself miserable over here. So long as I accomplish what I desire, and make my money hold out, I shall regard the thing as a success. Sometimes I feel rather lonely, especially in the evening; but I generally manage to interest myself in something or in some one. In the evening I usually read up about the objects of interest I have visited during the day, or I post up my journal. Sometimes I go to the theatre; or else I play the piano in the public parlour. The public parlour at the hotel isn't much; but the piano is better than that fearful old thing at the Sebago House.

Sometimes I go downstairs and talk to the lady who keeps the books—a French lady, who is remarkably polite. She is very pretty, and always wears a black dress, with the most beautiful fit; she speaks a little English; she tells me she had to learn it in order to converse with the Americans who come in such numbers to this hotel. She has given me a great deal of information about the position of woman in France, and much of it is very encouraging. But she has told me at the same time some things that I should not like to write to you (I am hesitating even about putting them into my journal), especially if my letters are to be handed round in the family. I assure you they appear to talk about things here that we never think of mentioning at Bangor, or even of thinking about. She seems to think she can tell me everything, because I told her I was travelling for general culture. Well, I *do* want to know so much that it seems sometimes as if I wanted to know everything; and yet there are some things that I think I don't want to know. But, as a general thing, everything is intensely interesting; I don't mean only everything that this French lady tells me, but everything I see and hear for myself. I feel really as if I should gain all I desire.

I meet a great many Americans, who, as a general thing, I must say, are not as polite to me as the people over here. The people over here—especially the gentlemen—are much more what I should call *attentive*. I don't know whether Americans are more *sincere*; I haven't yet made up my mind about that. The only drawback I experience is when Americans sometimes express surprise that I should be travelling round alone; so you see it doesn't come from Europeans. I always have my answer ready; "For general culture, to acquire the languages, and to see Europe for myself;" and that generally seems to satisfy them. Dear mother, my money holds out very well, and it *is* real interesting.

II.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

September 16th.

SINCE I last wrote to you I have left that hotel, and come to live in a French family. It's a kind of boarding-house combined with a kind of school ; only it's not like an American boarding-house, nor like an American school either. There are four or five people here that have come to learn the language—not to take lessons, but to have an opportunity for conversation. I was very glad to come to such a place, for I had begun to realise that I was not making much progress with the French. It seemed to me that I should feel ashamed to have spent two months in Paris, and not to have acquired more insight into the language. I had always heard so much of French conversation, and I found I was having no more opportunity to practise it than if I had remained at Bangor. In fact, I used to hear a great deal more at Bangor, from those French Canadians that came down to cut the ice, than I saw I should ever hear at that hotel. The lady that kept the books seemed to want so much to talk to me in English (for the sake of practice, too, I suppose), that I couldn't bear to let her know I didn't like it. The chambermaid was Irish, and all the waiters were German, so that I never heard a word of French spoken. I suppose you might hear a great deal in the shops ; only, as I don't buy anything—I prefer to spend my money for purposes of culture—I don't have that advantage.

I have been thinking some of taking a teacher, but I am well acquainted with the grammar already, and teachers always keep you bothering over the verbs. I was a good deal troubled, for I felt as if I didn't want

to go away without having, at least, got a general idea of French conversation. The theatre gives you a good deal of insight, and as I told you in my last, I go a good deal to places of amusement. I find no difficulty whatever in going to such places alone, and am always treated with the politeness which, as I told you before, I encounter everywhere. I see plenty of other ladies alone (mostly French), and they generally seem to be enjoying themselves as much as I. But at the theatre every one talks so fast that I can scarcely make out what they say; and, besides, there are a great many vulgar expressions which it is unnecessary to learn. But it was the theatre, nevertheless, that put me on the track. The very next day after I wrote to you last I went to the Palais Royal, which is one of the principal theatres in Paris. It is very small, but it is very celebrated, and in my guide-book it is marked with *two stars*, which is a sign of importance attached only to *first-class* objects of interest. But after I had been there half an hour I found I couldn't understand a single word of the play, they gabbled it off so fast, and they made use of such peculiar expressions. I felt a good deal disappointed and troubled—I was afraid I shouldn't gain all I had come for. But while I was thinking it over—thinking what I *should* do—I heard two gentlemen talking behind me. It was between the acts, and I couldn't help listening to what they said. They were talking English, but I guess they were Americans.

"Well," said one of them, "it all depends on what you are after. I'm after French; that's what I'm after."

"Well," said the other, "I'm after Art."

"Well," said the first, "I'm after Art too; but I'm after French most."

Then, dear mother, I am sorry to say the second one swore a little. He said, "Oh, damn French!"

"No, I won't damn French," said his friend. "I'll

acquire it—that's what I'll do with it. I'll go right into a family."

"What family'll you go into?"

"Into some French family. That's the only way to do—to go to some place where you can talk. If you're after Art, you want to stick to the galleries; you want to go right through the Louvre, room by room; you want to take a room a day, or something of that sort. But, if you want to acquire French, the thing is to look out for a family. There are lots of French families here that take you to board and teach you. My second cousin—that young lady I told you about—she got in with a crowd like that, and they booked her right up in three months. They just took her right in and they talked to her. That's what they do to you; they set you right down and they talk *at* you. You've got to understand them; you can't help yourself. That family my cousin was with has moved away somewhere, or I should try and get in with them. They were very smart people, that family; after she left, my cousin corresponded with them in French. But I mean to find some other crowd, if it takes a lot of trouble!"

I listened to all this with great interest, and when he spoke about his cousin I was on the point of turning around to ask him the address of the family that she was with; but the next moment he said they had moved away; so I sat still. The other gentleman, however, didn't seem to be affected in the same way as I was.

"Well," he said, "you may follow up that if you like; I mean to follow up the pictures. I don't believe there is ever going to be any considerable demand in the United States for French; but I can promise you that in about ten years there'll be a big demand for Art! And it won't be temporary either."

That remark may be very true, but I don't care anything about the demand; I want to know French for its own sake. I don't want to think I have been all

this while without having gained an insight. . . . The very next day, I asked the lady who kept the books at the hotel whether she knew of any family that could take me to board and give me the benefit of their conversation. She instantly threw up her hands, with several little shrill cries (in their French way, you know), and told me that her dearest friend kept a regular place of that kind. If she had known I was looking out for such a place she would have told me before; she had not spoken of it herself, because she didn't wish to injure the hotel by being the cause of my going away. She told me this was a charming family, who had often received American ladies (and others as well) who wished to follow up the language, and she was sure I should be delighted with them. So she gave me their address, and offered to go with me to introduce me. But I was in such a hurry that I went off by myself, and I had no trouble in finding these good people. They were delighted to receive me, and I was very much pleased with what I saw of them. They seemed to have plenty of conversation, and there will be no trouble about that.

I came here to stay about three days ago, and by this time I have seen a great deal of them. The price of board struck me as rather high; but I must remember that a quantity of conversation is thrown in. I have a very pretty little room—without any carpet, but with seven mirrors, two clocks, and five curtains. I was rather disappointed after I arrived to find that there are several other Americans here for the same purpose as myself. At least there are three Americans and two English people; and also a German gentleman. I am afraid, therefore, our conversation will be rather mixed, but I have not yet time to judge. I try to talk with Madame de Maisonrouge all I can (she is the lady of the house, and the *real* family consists only of herself and her two daughters). They are all most elegant, interest-

ing women, and I am sure we shall become intimate friends. I will write you more about them in my next. Tell William Platt I don't care what he does.

III.

FROM MISS VIOLET RAY, IN PARIS, TO MISS AGNES
RICH, IN NEW YORK.

September 21st.

WE had hardly got here when father received a telegram saying he would have to come right back to New York. It was for something about his business—I don't know exactly what; you know I never understand those things, never want to. We had just got settled at the hotel, in some charming rooms, and mother and I, as you may imagine, were greatly annoyed. Father is extremely fussy, as you know, and his first idea, as soon as he found he should have to go back, was that we should go back with him. He declared he would never leave us in Paris alone, and that we must return and come out again. I don't know what he thought would happen to us; I suppose he thought we should be too extravagant. It's father's theory that we are always running up bills, whereas a little observation would show him that we wear the same old *rags* FOR MONTHS. But father has no observation; he has nothing but theories. Mother and I, however, have, fortunately, a great deal of *practice*, and we succeeded in making him understand that we wouldn't budge from Paris, and that we would rather be chopped into small pieces than cross that dreadful ocean again. So, at last, he decided to go back alone, and to leave us here for three months. But, to show you how fussy he is, he refused to let us stay at the hotel, and insisted that we should go into a *family*. I don't know

what put such an idea into his head, unless it was some advertisement that he saw in one of the American papers that are published here.

There are families here who receive American and English people to live with them, under the pretence of teaching them French. You may imagine what people they are—I mean the families themselves. But the Americans who choose this peculiar manner of seeing Paris must be actually just as bad. Mother and I were horrified, and declared that *main force* should not remove us from the hotel. But father has a way of arriving at his ends which is more efficient than violence. He worries and fusses; he “nags,” as we used to say at school; and, when mother and I are quite worn out, his triumph is assured. Mother is usually worn out more easily than I, and she ends by siding with father; so that, at last, when they combine their forces against poor little me, I have to succumb. You should have heard the way father went on about this “family” plan; he talked to every one he saw about it; he used to go round to the banker’s and talk to the people there—the people in the post-office; he used to try and exchange ideas about it with the waiters at the hotel. He said it would be more safe, more respectable, more economical; that I should perfect my French; that mother would learn how a French household is conducted; that he should feel more easy, and five hundred reasons more. They were none of them good, but that made no difference. It’s all humbug, his talking about economy, when every one knows that business in America has completely recovered, that the prostration is all over, and that *immense fortunes* are being made. We have been economising for the last five years, and I supposed we came abroad to reap the benefits of it.

As for my French, it is quite as perfect as I want it to be. (I assure you I am often surprised at my own fluency, and, when I get a little more practice in the

genders and the idioms, I shall do very well in this respect.) To make a long story short, however, father carried his point, as usual ; mother basely deserted me at the last moment, and, after holding out alone for three days, I told them to do with me what they pleased ! Father lost three steamers in succession by remaining in Paris to argue with me. You know he is like the school-master in Goldsmith's "Deserted Village"—"e'en though vanquished, he would argue still." He and mother went to look at some seventeen families (they had got the addresses somewhere), while I retired to my sofa, and would have nothing to do with it. At last they made arrangements, and I was transported to the establishment from which I now write you. I write you from the bosom of a Parisian ménage—from the depths of a second-rate boarding-house.

Father only left Paris after he had seen us what he calls comfortably settled here, and had informed Madame de Maisonrouge (the mistress of the establishment—the head of the "family") that he wished my French pronunciation especially attended to. The pronunciation, as it happens, is just what I am most at home in ; if he had said my genders or my idioms there would have been some sense. But poor father has no tact, and this defect is especially marked since he has been in Europe. He will be absent, however, for three months, and mother and I shall breathe more freely ; the situation will be less intense. I must confess that we breathe more freely than I expected, in this place, where we have been for about a week. I was sure, before we came, that it would prove to be an establishment of the *lowest description* ; but I must say that, in this respect, I am agreeably disappointed. The French are so clever that they know even how to manage a place of this kind. Of course it is very disagreeable to live with strangers, but as, after all, if I were not staying with Madame de Maisonrouge I should not be living in the Faubourg St.-

Germain, I don't know that from the point of view of exclusiveness it is any great loss to be here.

Our rooms are very prettily arranged, and the table is remarkably good. Mamma thinks the whole thing—the place and the people, the manners and customs—very amusing; but mamma is very easily amused. As for me, you know, all that I ask is to be let alone, and not to have people's society *forced upon me*. I have never wanted for society of my own choosing, and, so long as I retain possession of my faculties, I don't suppose I ever shall. As I said, however, the place is very well managed, and I succeed in doing as I please, which, you know, is my most cherished pursuit. Madame de Maisonrouge has a great deal of tact—much more than poor father. She is what they call here a *belle femme*, which means that she is a tall, ugly woman, with style. She dresses very well, and has a great deal of talk; but, though she is a very good imitation of a lady, I never see her behind the dinner-table, in the evening, smiling and bowing, as the people come in, and looking all the while at the dishes and the servants, without thinking of a *dame de comptoir* blooming in a corner of a shop or a restaurant. I am sure that, in spite of her fine name, she was once a *dame de comptoir*. I am also sure that, in spite of her smiles and the pretty things she says to every one, she hates us all, and would like to murder us. She is a hard, clever Frenchwoman, who would like to amuse herself and enjoy her Paris, and she must be bored to death at passing all her time in the midst of stupid English people who mumble broken French at her. Some day she will poison the soup or the *vin rouge*; but I hope that will not be until after mother and I shall have left her. She has two daughters, who, except that one is decidedly pretty, are meagre imitations of herself.

The "family," for the rest, consists altogether of our beloved compatriots, and of still more beloved Eng-

landers. There is an Englishman here, with his sister, and they seem to be rather nice people. He is remarkably handsome, but excessively affected and patronising, especially to us Americans; and I hope to have a chance of biting his head off before long. The sister is very pretty, and, apparently, very nice; but, in costume, she is Britannia incarnate. There is a very pleasant little Frenchman—when they are nice they are charming—and a German doctor, a big blonde man, who looks like a great white bull; and two Americans, besides mother and me. One of them is a young man from Boston,—an æsthetic young man, who talks about its being “a real Corot day,” etc., and a young woman—a girl, a female, I don’t know what to call her—from Vermont, or Minnesota, or some such place. This young woman is the most extraordinary specimen of artless Yankeeism that I ever encountered; she is really too horrible. I have been three times to Clémentine about your under-skirt, etc.

IV.

FROM LOUIS LEVERETT, IN PARIS, TO HARVARD
TREMONT, IN BOSTON.

September 25th.

MY DEAR HARVARD—I have carried out my plan, of which I gave you a hint in my last, and I only regret that I should not have done it before. It is human nature, after all, that is the most interesting thing in the world, and it only reveals itself to the truly earnest seeker. There is a want of earnestness in that life of hotels and railroad trains, which so many of our countrymen are content to lead in this strange Old World, and I was distressed to find how far I, myself, had been led along the dusty, beaten track. I had, however, con-

stantly wanted to turn aside into more unfrequented ways ; to plunge beneath the surface and see what I should discover. But the opportunity had always been missing ; somehow, I never meet those opportunities that we hear about and read about—the things that happen to people in novels and biographies. And yet I am always on the watch to take advantage of any opening that may present itself ; I am always looking out for experiences, for sensations—I might almost say for adventures.

The great thing is to *live*, you know—to feel, to be conscious of one's possibilities ; not to pass through life mechanically and insensibly, like a letter through the post-office. There are times, my dear Harvard, when I feel as if I were really capable of everything—*capable de tout*, as they say here—of the greatest excesses as well as the greatest heroism. Oh, to be able to say that one has lived—*qu'on a vécu*, as they say here—that idea exercises an indefinable attraction for me. You will, perhaps, reply, it is easy to say it ; but the thing is to make people believe you ! And, then, I don't want any second-hand, spurious sensations ; I want the knowledge that leaves a trace—that leaves strange scars and stains and reveries behind it ! But I am afraid I shock you, perhaps even frighten you.

If you repeat my remarks to any of the West Cedar Street circle, be sure you tone them down as your discretion will suggest. For yourself, you will know that I have always had an intense desire to see something of *real French life*. You are acquainted with my great sympathy with the French ; with my natural tendency to enter into the French way of looking at life. I sympathise with the artistic temperament ; I remember you used sometimes to hint to me that you thought my own temperament too artistic. I don't think that in Boston there is any real sympathy with the artistic temperament ; we tend to make everything a matter of

right and wrong. And in Boston one can't *live*—*on ne peut pas vivre*, as they say here. I don't mean one can't reside—for a great many people manage that ; but one can't live æsthetically—I may almost venture to say, sensuously. This is why I have always been so much drawn to the French, who are so æsthetic, so sensuous. I am so sorry that Théophile Gautier has passed away ; I should have liked so much to go and see him, and tell him all that I owe him. He was living when I was here before ; but, you know, at that time I was travelling with the Johnsons, who are not æsthetic, and who used to make me feel rather ashamed of my artistic temperament. If I had gone to see the great apostle of beauty, I should have had to go clandestinely—*en cachette*, as they say here ; and that is not my nature ; I like to do everything frankly, freely, *naïvement, au grand jour*. That is the great thing—to be free, to be frank, to be *naïf*. Doesn't Matthew Arnold say that somewhere—or is it Swinburne, or Pater ?

When I was with the Johnsons everything was superficial ; and, as regards life, everything was brought down to the question of right and wrong. They were too didactic ; art should never be didactic ; and what is life but an art ? Pater has said that so well, somewhere. With the Johnsons I am afraid I lost many opportunities ; the tone was gray and cottony, I might almost say woolly. But now, as I tell you, I have determined to take right hold for myself ; to look right into European life, and judge it without Johnsonian prejudices. I have taken up my residence in a French family, in a real Parisian house. You see I have the courage of my opinions ; I don't shrink from carrying out my theory that the great thing is to *live*.

You know I have always been intensely interested in Balzac, who never shrank from the reality, and whose almost *lurid* pictures of Parisian life have often haunted me in my wanderings through the old wicked-looking streets on the other side of the river. I am only sorry

that my new friends—my French family—do not live in the old city—*au cœur du vieux Paris*, as they say here. They live only in the Boulevard Haussman, which is less picturesque ; but in spite of this they have a great deal of the Balzac tone. Madame de Maisonrouge belongs to one of the oldest and proudest families in France ; but she has had reverses which have compelled her to open an establishment in which a limited number of travellers, who are weary of the beaten track, who have the sense of local colour—she explains it herself, she expresses it so well—in short, to open a sort of boarding-house. I don't see why I should not, after all, use that expression, for it is the correlative of the term *pension bourgeoise*, employed by Balzac in the *Père Goriot*. Do you remember the *pension bourgeoise* of Madame Vauquer *née de Conflans* ? But this establishment is not at all like that : and indeed it is not at all *bourgeois* ; there is something distinguished, something aristocratic, about it. The Pension Vauquer was dark, brown, sordid, *graisseuse* ; but this is in quite a different tone, with high, clear, lightly-draped windows, tender, subtle, almost morbid, colours, and furniture in elegant, studied, reed-like lines. Madame de Maisonrouge reminds me of Madame Hulot—do you remember “la belle Madame Hulot ?”—in *Les Barents Pauvres*. She has a great charm ; a little artificial, a little fatigued, with a little suggestion of hidden things in her life ; but I have always been sensitive to the charm of fatigue, of duplicity.

I am rather disappointed, I confess, in the society I find here ; it is not so local, so characteristic, as I could have desired. Indeed, to tell the truth, it is not local at all ; but, on the other hand, it is cosmopolitan, and there is a great advantage in that. We are French, we are English, we are American, we are German ; and, I believe, there are some Russians and Hungarians expected. I am much interested in the study of national types ; in comparing, contrasting, seizing the strong

points, the weak points, the point of view of each. It is interesting to shift one's point of view—to enter into strange, exotic ways of looking at life.

The American types here are not, I am sorry to say, so interesting as they might be, and, excepting myself, are exclusively feminine. We are *thin*, my dear Harvard; we are pale, we are sharp. There is something meagre about us; our line is wanting in roundness, our composition in richness. We lack temperament; we don't know how to live; *nous ne savons pas vivre*, as they say here. The American temperament is represented (putting myself aside, and I often think that my temperament is not at all American) by a young girl and her mother, and another young girl without her mother—without her mother or any attendant or appendage whatever. These young girls are rather curious types; they have a certain interest, they have a certain grace, but they are disappointing too; they don't go far; they don't keep all they promise; they don't satisfy the imagination. They are cold, slim, sexless; the physique is not generous, not abundant; it is only the drapery, the skirts and furbelows (that is, I mean in the young lady who has her mother) that are abundant. They are very different: one of them all elegance, all expensiveness, with an air of high fashion, from New York; the other a plain, pure, clear-eyed, straight-waisted, straight-stepping maiden from the heart of New England. And yet they are very much alike too—more alike than they would care to think themselves; for they eye each other with cold, mistrustful, deprecating looks. They are both specimens of the emancipated young American girl—practical, positive, passionless, subtle, and knowing, as you please, either too much or too little. And yet, as I say, they have a certain stamp, a certain grace; I like to talk with them, to study them.

The fair New Yorker is, sometimes, very amusing; she asks me if every one in Boston talks like me—if every one is as “intellectual” as your poor correspondent.

She is for ever throwing Boston up at me ; I can't get rid of Boston. The other one rubs it into me too ; but in a different way ; she seems to feel about it as a good Mahommedan feels toward Mecca, and regards it as a kind of focus of light for the whole human race. Poor little Boston, what nonsense is talked in thy name ! But this New England maiden is, in her way, a strange type : she is travelling all over Europe alone—"to see it," she says, "for herself." For herself ! What can that stiff slim self of hers do with such sights, such visions ! She looks at everything, goes everywhere, passes her way, with her clear quiet eyes wide open ; skirting the edge of obscene abysses without suspecting them ; pushing through brambles without tearing her robe ; exciting, without knowing it, the most injurious suspicions ; and always holding her course, passionless, stainless, fearless, charmless ! It is a little figure in which, after all, if you can get the right point of view, there is something rather striking.

By way of contrast, there is a lovely English girl, with eyes as shy as violets, and a voice as sweet ! She has a sweet Gainsborough head, and a great Gainsborough hat, with a mighty plume in front of it, which makes a shadow over her quiet English eyes. Then she has a sage-green robe, "mystic, wonderful," all embroidered with subtle devices and flowers, and birds of tender tint ; very straight and tight in front, and adorned behind, along the spine, with large, strange, iridescent buttons. The revival of taste, of the sense of beauty, in England, interests me deeply ; what is there in a simple row of spinal buttons to make one dream—to *donner à rêver*, as they say here ? I think that a great æsthetic renaissance is at hand, and that a great light will be kindled in England, for all the world to see. There are spirits there that I should like to commune with ; I think they would understand me.

This gracious English maiden, with her clinging robes, her amulets and girdles, with something quaint and

angular in her step, her carriage something mediæval and Gothic, in the details of her person and dress, this lovely Evelyn Vane (isn't it a beautiful name?) is deeply, delightfully picturesque. She is much a woman—*elle est bien femme*, as they say here; simpler, softer, rounder, richer than the young girls I spoke of just now. Not much talk—a great, sweet silence. Then the violet eye—the very eye itself seems to blush; the great shadowy hat, making the brow so quiet; the strange, clinging, clutching, pictured raiment! As I say, it is a very gracious, tender type. She has her brother with her, who is a beautiful, fair-haired, gray-eyed young Englishman. He is purely objective; and he, too, is very plastic.

V.

FROM MIRANDA HOPE TO HER MOTHER.

September 26th.

YOU must not be frightened at not hearing from me oftener; it is not because I am in any trouble, but because I am getting on so well. If I were in any trouble I don't think I should write to you; I should just keep quiet and see it through myself. But that is not the case at present; and, if I don't write to you, it is because I am so deeply interested over here that I don't seem to find time. It was a real providence that brought me to this house, where, in spite of all obstacles, I am able to do much good work. I wonder how I find the time for all I do; but when I think that I have only got a year in Europe, I feel as if I wouldn't sacrifice a single hour.

The obstacles I refer to are the disadvantages I have in learning French, there being so many persons around me speaking English, and that, as you may say, in the

very bosom of a French family. It seems as if you heard English everywhere ; but I certainly didn't expect to find it in a place like this. I am not discouraged, however, and I talk French all I can, even with the other English boarders. Then I have a lesson every day from Miss Maisonrouge (the elder daughter of the lady of the house), and French conversation every evening in the *salon*, from eight to eleven, with Madame herself, and some friends of hers that often come in. Her cousin, Mr. Verdier, a young French gentleman, is fortunately staying with her, and I make a point of talking with him as much as possible. I have *extra private lessons* from him, and I often go out to walk with him. Some night, soon, he is to accompany me to the opera. We have also a most interesting plan of visiting all the galleries in Paris together. Like most of the French, he converses with great fluency, and I feel as if I should really gain from him. He is remarkably handsome, and extremely polite—paying a great many compliments, which, I am afraid, are not always *sincere*. When I return to Bangor I will tell you some of the things he has said to me. I think you will consider them extremely curious, and very beautiful *in their way*.

The conversation in the parlour (from eight to eleven) is often remarkably brilliant, and I often wish that you, or some of the Bangor folks, could be there to enjoy it. Even though you couldn't understand it I think you would like to hear the way they go on ; they seem to express so much. I sometimes think that at Bangor they don't express enough (but it seems as if over there, there was less to express). It seems as if, at Bangor, there were things that folks never *tried* to say ; but here, I have learned from studying French that you have no idea what you *can* say, before you try. At Bangor they seem to give it up beforehand ; they don't make any effort. (I don't say this in the least for William Platt, *in particular*.)

I am sure I don't know what they will think of me

when I get back. It seems as if, over here, I had learned to come out with everything. I suppose they will think I am not sincere ; but isn't it more sincere to come out with things than to conceal them ? I have become very good friends with every one in the house—that is (you see, I *am* sincere), with *almost* every one. It is the most interesting circle I ever was in. There's a girl here, an American, that I don't like so much as the rest ; but that is only because she won't let me. I should like to like her, ever so much, because she is most lovely and most attractive ; but she doesn't seem to want to know me or to like me. She comes from New York, and she is remarkably pretty, with beautiful eyes and the most delicate features ; she is also remarkably elegant—in this respect would bear comparison with any one I have seen over here. But it seems as if she didn't want to recognise me or associate with me ; as if she wanted to make a difference between us. It is like people they call “haughty” in books. I have never seen any one like that before—any one that wanted to make a difference ; and at first I was right down interested, she seemed to me so like a proud young lady in a novel. I kept saying to myself all day, “haughty, haughty,” and I wished she would keep on so. But she did keep on ; she kept on too long ; and then I began to feel hurt. I couldn't think what I have done, and I can't think yet. It's as if she had got some idea about me, or had heard some one say something. If some girls should behave like that I shouldn't make any account of it ; but this one is so refined, and looks as if she might be so interesting if I once got to know her, that I think about it a good deal. I am bound to find out what her reason is—for of course she has got some reason ; I am right down curious to know.

I went up to her to ask her the day before yesterday ; I thought that was the best way. I told her I wanted to know her better, and would like to come and see her in her room—they tell me she has got a lovely room—and that if she

had heard anything against me, perhaps she would tell me when I came. But she was more distant than ever, and she just turned it off; said that she had never heard me mentioned, and that her room was too small to receive visitors. I suppose she spoke the truth, but I am sure she has got some reason, all the same. She has got some idea, and I am bound to find out before I go, if I have to ask everybody in the house. I *am* right down curious. I wonder if she doesn't think me refined—or if she had ever heard anything against Bangor? I can't think it is that. Don't you remember when Clara Barnard went to visit New York, three years ago, how much attention she received? And you know Clara *is* Bangor, to the soles of her shoes. Ask William Platt—so long as he isn't a native—if he doesn't consider Clara Barnard refined.

Apropos, as they say here, of refinement, there is another American in the house—a gentleman from Boston—who is just crowded with it. His name is Mr. Louis Leverett (such a beautiful name, I think), and he is about thirty years old. He is rather small, and he looks pretty sick; he suffers from some affection of the liver. But his conversation is remarkably interesting, and I delight to listen to him—he has such beautiful ideas. I feel as if it were hardly right, not being in French; but, fortunately, he uses a great many French expressions. It's in a different style from the conversation of Mr. Verdier—not so complimentary, but more intellectual. He is intensely fond of pictures, and has given me a great many ideas about them which I should never have gained without him; I shouldn't have known where to look for such ideas. He thinks everything of pictures; he thinks we don't make near enough of them. They seem to make a good deal of them here; but I couldn't help telling him the other day that in Bangor I really don't think we do.

If I had any money to spend I would buy some and take them back, to hang up. Mr. Leverett says it would do them good—not the pictures, but the Bangor folks.

He thinks everything of the French, too, and says we don't make nearly enough of *them*. I couldn't help telling him the other day that at any rate they make enough of themselves. But it is very interesting to hear him go on about the French, and it is so much gain to me, so long as that is what I came for. I talk to him as much as I dare about Boston, but I do feel as if this were right down wrong—a stolen pleasure.

I can get all the Boston culture I want when I go back, if I carry out my plan, my happy vision, of going there to reside. I ought to direct all my efforts to European culture now, and keep Boston to finish off. But it seems as if I couldn't help taking a peep now and then, in advance—with a Bostonian. I don't know when I may meet one again; but if there are many others like Mr. Leverett there, I shall be certain not to want when I carry out my dream. He is just as full of culture as he can live. But it seems strange how many different sorts there are.

There are two of the English who I suppose are very cultivated too; but it doesn't seem as if I could enter into theirs so easily, though I try all I can. I do love their way of speaking, and sometimes I feel almost as if it would be right to give up trying to learn French, and just try to learn to speak our own tongue as these English speak it. It isn't the things they say so much, though these are often rather curious, but it is in the way they pronounce, and the sweetness of their voice. It seems as if they must *try* a good deal to talk like that; but these English that are here don't seem to try at all, either to speak or do anything else. They are a young lady and her brother. I believe they belong to some noble family. I have had a good deal of intercourse with them, because I have felt more free to talk to them than to the Americans—on account of the language. It seems as if in talking with them I was almost learning a new one.

I never supposed, when I left Bangor, that I was coming to Europe to learn *English*! If I do learn it, I don't think you will understand me when I get back, and I don't think you'll like it much. I should be a good deal criticised if I spoke like that at Bangor. However, I verily believe Bangor is the most critical place on earth; I have seen nothing like it over here. Tell them all I have come to the conclusion that they are *a great deal too fastidious*. But I was speaking about this English young lady and her brother. I wish I could put them before you. She is lovely to look at; she seems so modest and retiring. In spite of this, however, she dresses in a way that attracts great attention, as I couldn't help noticing when one day I went out to walk with her. She was ever so much looked at; but she didn't seem to notice it, until at last I couldn't help calling attention to it. Mr. Leverett thinks everything of it; he calls it the "costume of the future." I should call it rather the costume of the past—you know the English have such an attachment to the past. I said this the other day to Madame de Maisonrouge—that Miss Vane dressed in the costume of the past. *De l'an passé, vous voulez dire?* said Madame, with her little French laugh (you can get William Platt to translate this, he used to tell me he knew so much French).

You know I told you, in writing some time ago, that I had tried to get some insight into the position of woman in England, and, being here with Miss Vane, it has seemed to me to be a good opportunity to get a little more. I have asked her a great deal about it; but she doesn't seem able to give me much information. The first time I asked her she told me the position of a lady depended upon the rank of her father, her eldest brother, her husband, etc. She told me her own position was very good, because her father was some relation—I forget what—to a lord. She thinks everything of this; and that proves to me that the position of woman in her

country cannot be satisfactory ; because, if it were, it wouldn't depend upon that of your relations, even your nearest. I don't know much about lords, and it does try my patience (though she is just as sweet as she can live) to hear her talk as if it were a matter of course that I should.

I feel as if it were right to ask her as often as I can if she doesn't consider every one equal ; but she always says she doesn't, and she confesses that she doesn't think she is equal to "Lady Something-or-other," who is the wife of that relation of her father. I try and persuade her all I can that she is ; but it seems as if she didn't want to be persuaded ; and when I ask her if Lady So-and-so is of the same opinion (that Miss Vane isn't her equal), she looks so soft and pretty with her eyes, and says, "Of course she is !" When I tell her that this is right down bad for Lady So-and-so, it seems as if she wouldn't believe me, and the only answer she will make is that Lady So-and-so is "extremely nice." I don't believe she is nice at all ; if she were nice, she wouldn't have such ideas as that. I tell Miss Vane that at Bangor we think such ideas vulgar ; but then she looks as though she had never heard of Bangor. I often want to shake her, though she *is* so sweet. If she isn't angry with the people who make her feel that way, I am angry for her. I am angry with her brother too, for she is evidently very much afraid of him, and this gives me some further insight into the subject. She thinks everything of her brother, and thinks it natural that she should be afraid of him, not only physically (for this *is* natural, as he is enormously tall and strong, and has very big fists), but morally and intellectually. She seems unable, however, to take in any argument, and she makes me realise what I have often heard—that if you are timid nothing will reason you out of it.

Mr. Vane, also (the brother), seems to have the same prejudices, and when I tell him, as I often think

it right to do, that his sister is not his subordinate, even if she does think so, but his equal, and, perhaps in some respects his superior, and that if my brother, in Bangor, were to treat me as he treats this poor young girl, who has not spirit enough to see the question in its true light, there would be an indignation meeting of the citizens to protest against such an outrage to the sanctity of womanhood—when I tell him all this, at breakfast or dinner, he bursts out laughing so loud that all the plates clatter on the table.

But at such a time as this there is always one person who seems interested in what I say—a German gentleman, a professor, who sits next to me at dinner, and whom I must tell you more about another time. He is very learned, and has a great desire for information; he appreciates a great many of my remarks, and after dinner, in the salon, he often comes to me to ask me questions about them. I have to think a little, sometimes, to know what I did say, or what I do think. He takes you right up where you left off, and he is almost as fond of discussing things as William Platt is. He is splendidly educated, in the German style, and he told me the other day that he was an “intellectual broom.” Well, if he is, he sweeps clean; I told him that. After he has been talking to me I feel as if I hadn’t got a speck of dust left in my mind anywhere. It’s a most delightful feeling. He says he’s an observer; and I am sure there is plenty over here to observe. But I have told you enough for to-day. I don’t know how much longer I shall stay here; I am getting on so fast that it sometimes seems as if I shouldn’t need all the time I have laid out. I suppose your cold weather has promptly begun, as usual; it sometimes makes me envy you. The fall weather here is very dull and damp, and I feel very much as if I should like to be braced up.

VI.

FROM MISS EVELYN VANE, IN PARIS, TO THE LADY
AUGUSTA FLEMING, AT BRIGHTON.

PARIS, September 30th.

DEAR LADY AUGUSTA—I am afraid I shall not be able to come to you on January 7th, as you kindly proposed at Homburg. I am so very, very sorry; it is a great disappointment to me. But I have just heard that it has been settled that mamma and the children are coming abroad for a part of the winter, and mamma wishes me to go with them to Hyères, where Georgina has been ordered for her lungs. She has not been at all well these three months, and now that the damp weather has begun she is very poorly indeed; so that last week papa decided to have a consultation, and he and mamma went with her up to town and saw some three or four doctors. They all of them ordered the south of France, but they didn't agree about the place; so that mamma herself decided for Hyères, because it is the most economical. I believe it is very dull, but I hope it will do Georgina good. I am afraid, however, that nothing will do her good until she consents to take more care of herself; I am afraid she is very wild and wilful, and mamma tells me that all this month it has taken papa's positive orders to make her stop in-doors. She is very cross (mamma writes me) about coming abroad, and doesn't seem at all to mind the expense that papa has been put to—talks very ill-naturedly about losing the hunting, etc. She expected to begin to hunt in December, and wants to know whether anybody keeps hounds at Hyères. Fancy a girl wanting to follow the hounds when her lungs are so bad! But I daresay that when she gets there she will be glad enough to keep quiet, as they say that the

heat is intense. It may cure Georgina, but I am sure it will make the rest of us very ill.

Mamma, however, is only going to bring Mary and Gus and Fred and Adelaide abroad with her ; the others will remain at Kingscote until February (about the 3d), when they will go to Eastbourne for a month with Miss Turnover, the new governess, who has turned out such a very nice person. She is going to take Miss Travers, who has been with us so long, but who is only qualified for the younger children, to Hyères, and I believe some of the Kingscote servants. She has perfect confidence in Miss T. ; it is only a pity she has such an odd name. Mamma thought of asking her if she would mind taking another when she came ; but papa thought she might object. Lady Battledown makes all her governesses take the same name ; she gives £5 more a year for the purpose. I forget what it is she calls them ; I think it's Johnson (which to me always suggests a lady's maid). Governesses shouldn't have too pretty a name ; they shouldn't have a nicer name than the family.

I suppose you heard from the Desmonds that I did not go back to England with them. When it began to be talked about that Georgina should be taken abroad, mamma wrote to me that I had better stop in Paris for a month with Harold, so that she could pick me up on their way to Hyères. It saves the expense of my journey to Kingscote and back, and gives me the opportunity to "finish" a little in French.

You know Harold came here six weeks ago, to get up his French for those dreadful examinations that he has to pass so soon. He came to live with some French people that take in young men (and others) for this purpose ; it's a kind of coaching place, only kept by women. Mamma had heard it was very nice ; so she wrote to me that I was to come and stop here with Harold. The Desmonds brought me and made the arrangement, or the bargain, or whatever you call it. Poor Harold was

naturally not at all pleased ; but he has been very kind, and has treated me like an angel. He is getting on beautifully with his French ; for though I don't think the place is so good as papa supposed, yet Harold is so immensely clever that he can scarcely help learning. I am afraid I learn much less, but, fortunately, I have not to pass an examination—except if mamma takes it into her head to examine me. But she will have so much to think of with Georgina that I hope this won't occur to her. If it does, I shall be, as Harold says, in a dreadful funk.

This is not such a nice place for a girl as for a young man, and the Desmonds thought it *exceedingly odd* that mamma should wish me to come here. As Mrs. Desmond said, it is because she is so very unconventional. But you know Paris is so very amusing, and if only Harold remains good-natured about it, I shall be content to wait for the caravan (that's what he calls mamma and the children). The person who keeps the establishment, or whatever they call it, is rather odd, and *exceedingly foreign* ; but she is wonderfully civil, and is perpetually sending to my door to see if I want anything. The servants are not at all like English servants, and come bursting in, the footman (they have only one) and the maids alike, at all sorts of hours, in the *most sudden way*. Then when one rings, it is half an hour before they come. All this is very uncomfortable, and I daresay it will be worse at Hyères. There, however, fortunately, we shall have our own people.

There are some very odd Americans here, who keep throwing Harold into fits of laughter. One is a dreadful little man who is always sitting over the fire, and talking about the colour of the sky. I don't believe he ever saw the sky except through the window-pane. The other day he took hold of my frock (that green one you thought so nice at Homburg) and told me that it reminded him of the texture of the Devonshire turf. And then he

talked for half an hour about the Devonshire turf, which I thought such a very extraordinary subject. Harold says he is mad. It is very strange to be living in this way with people one doesn't know. I mean that one doesn't know as one knows them in England.

The other Americans (beside the madman) are two girls, about my own age, one of whom is rather nice. She has a mother; but the mother is always sitting in her bedroom, which seems so very odd. I should like mamma to ask them to Kingscote, but I am afraid mamma wouldn't like the mother, who is rather vulgar. The other girl is rather vulgar too, and is travelling about quite alone. I think she is a kind of school-mistress; but the other girl (I mean the nicer one, with the mother) tells me she is more respectable than she seems. She has, however, the most extraordinary opinions—wishes to do away with the aristocracy, thinks it wrong that Arthur should have Kingscote when papa dies, etc. I don't see what it signifies to her that poor Arthur should come into the property, which will be so delightful—except for papa dying. But Harold says she is mad. He chaffs her tremendously about her radicalism, and he is so immensely clever that she can't answer him, though she is rather clever too.

There is also a Frenchman, a nephew, or cousin, or something, of the person of the house, who is extremely nasty; and a German professor, or doctor, who eats with his knife and is a great bore. I am so very sorry about giving up my visit. I am afraid you will never ask me again.

VII.

FROM LÉON VERDIER, IN PARIS, TO PROSPER GORAIN,
AT LILLE.

September 28th.

MY DEAR PROSPER—It is a long time since I have given you of my news, and I don't know what puts it into my head to-night to recall myself to your affectionate memory. I suppose it is that when we are happy the mind reverts instinctively to those with whom formerly we shared our exaltations and depressions, and *je t'en ai trop dit, dans le bon temps, mon gros Prosper*, and you always listened to me too imperturbably, with your pipe in your mouth, your waistcoat unbuttoned, for me not to feel that I can count upon your sympathy to-day. *Nous en sommes nous flanquées, des confidences*—in those happy days when my first thought in seeing an adventure *poindre à l'horizon* was of the pleasure I should have in relating it to the great Prosper. As I tell thee, I am happy; decidedly, I am happy, and from this affirmation I fancy you can construct the rest. Shall I help thee a little? Take three adorable girls . . . three, my good Prosper—the mystic number—neither more nor less. Take them and place thy insatiable little Léon in the midst of them! Is the situation sufficiently indicated, and do you apprehend the motives of my felicity?

You expected, perhaps, I was going to tell you that I had made my fortune, or that the Uncle Blondeau had at last decided to return into the breast of nature, after having constituted me his universal legatee. But I needn't remind you that women are always for something in the happiness of him who writes to thee—for something in his happiness, and for a good deal more in his misery. But don't let me talk of misery now; time enough when it comes; *ces demoiselles* have gone to join

the serried ranks of their amiable predecessors. Excuse me—I comprehend your impatience. I will tell you of whom *ces demoiselles* consist.

You have heard me speak of my *cousine* de Maison-rouge, that *grande belle femme*, who, after having married, *en secondes nocés*—there had been, to tell the truth, some irregularity about her first union—a venerable relic of the old noblesse of Poitou, was left, by the death of her husband, complicated by the indulgence of expensive tastes on an income of 17,000 francs, on the pavement of Paris, with two little demons of daughters to bring up in the path of virtue. She managed to bring them up; my little cousins are rigidly virtuous. If you ask me how she managed it, I can't tell you; it's no business of mine, and, *à fortiori*, none of yours. She is now fifty years old (she confesses to thirty-seven), and her daughters, whom she has never been able to marry, are respectively twenty-seven and twenty-three (they confess to twenty and to seventeen). Three years ago she had the thrice-blessed idea of opening a sort of *pension* for the entertainment and instruction of the blundering barbarians who come to Paris in the hope of picking up a few stray particles of the language of Voltaire—or of Zola. The idea *lui a porté bonheur*; the shop does a very good business. Until within a few months ago it was carried on by my cousins alone; but lately the need of a few extensions and embellishments has caused itself to be felt. My cousin has undertaken them, regardless of expense; she has asked me to come and stay with her—board and lodging gratis—and keep an eye on the grammatical eccentricities of her *pensionnaires*. I am the extension, my good Prosper; I am the embellishment! I live for nothing, and I straighten up the accent of the prettiest English lips. The English lips are not all pretty, heaven knows, but enough of them are so to make it a gaining bargain for me.

Just now, as I told you, I am in daily conversation

with three separate pairs. The owner of one of them has private lessons ; she pays extra. My cousin doesn't give me a sou of the money ; but I make bold, nevertheless, to say that my trouble is remunerated. But I am well, very well, with the proprietors of the two other pairs. One of them is a little Anglaise, of about twenty—a little *figure de keepsake* ; the most adorable miss that you ever, or at least that I ever beheld. She is decorated all over with beads and bracelets and embroidered dandelions ; but her principal decoration consists of the softest little gray eyes in the world, which rest upon you with a profundity of confidence—a confidence that I really feel some compunction in betraying. She has a tint as white as this sheet of paper, except just in the middle of each cheek, where it passes into the purest and most transparent, most liquid, carmine. Occasionally this rosy fluid overflows into the rest of her face—by which I mean that she blushes—as softly as the mark of your breath on the window-pane.

Like every Anglaise, she is rather pinched and prim in public ; but it is very easy to see that when no one is looking *elle ne demande qu'à se laisser aller !* Whenever she wants it I am always there, and I have given her to understand that she can count upon me. I have reason to believe that she appreciates the assurance, though I am bound in honesty to confess that with her the situation is a little less advanced than with the others. *Que voulez-vous ?* The English are heavy, and the Anglaises move slowly, that's all. The movement, however, is perceptible, and once this fact is established I can let the pottage simmer. I can give her time to arrive, for I am over-well occupied with her *concurrentes*. *Celles-ci* don't keep me waiting, *par exemple !*

These young ladies are Americans, and you know that it is the national character to move fast. "All right—go ahead !" (I am learning a great deal of English, or, rather, a great deal of American.) They go ahead

at a rate that sometimes makes it difficult for me to keep up. One of them is prettier than the other ; but this latter (the one that takes the private lessons) is really *une fille prodigieuse*. Ah, par exemple, elle brûle ses vaisseaux cella-la ! She threw herself into my arms the very first day, and I almost owed her a grudge for having deprived me of that pleasure of gradation, of carrying the defences, one by one, which is almost as great as that of entering the place.

Would you believe that at the end of exactly twelve minutes she gave me a rendezvous ? It is true it was in the Galerie d'Apollon, at the Louvre ; but that was respectable for a beginning, and since then we have had them by the dozen ; I have ceased to keep the account. *Non, c'est une fille qui me dépasse.*

The little one (she has a mother somewhere, out of sight, shut up in a closet or a trunk) is a good deal prettier, and, perhaps, on that account *elle y met plus de façons*. She doesn't knock about Paris with me by the hour ; she contents herself with long interviews in the *petit salon*, with the curtains half-drawn, beginning at about three o'clock, when every one is à la promenade. She is admirable, this little one ; a little too thin, the bones rather accentuated, but the detail, on the whole, most satisfactory. And you can say anything to her. She takes the trouble to appear not to understand, but her conduct, half an hour afterwards, reassures you completely—oh, completely !

However, it is the tall one, the one of the private lessons, that is the most remarkable. These private lessons, my good Prosper, are the most brilliant invention of the age, and a real stroke of genius on the part of Miss Miranda ! They also take place in the *petit salon*, but with the doors tightly closed, and with explicit directions to every one in the house that we are not to be disturbed. And we are not, my good Prosper ; we are not ! Not a sound, not a shadow, interrupts our felicity.

My *cousine* is really admirable ; the shop deserves to succeed. Miss Miranda is tall and rather flat ; she is too pale ; she hasn't the adorable *rougeurs* of the little Anglaise. But she has bright, keen, inquisitive eyes, superb teeth, a nose modelled by a sculptor, and a way of holding up her head and looking every one in the face, which is the most finished piece of impertinence I ever beheld. She is making the *tour du monde* entirely alone, without even a soubrette to carry the ensign, for the purpose of seeing for herself *à quoi s'en tenir sur les hommes et les choses*—on *les hommes* particularly. *Dis donc*, Prosper, it must be a *drôle de pays* over there, where young persons animated by this ardent curiosity are manufactured ! If we should turn the tables, some day, thou and I, and go over and see it for ourselves. It is as well that we should go and find them *chez elles*, as that they should come out here after us. *Dis donc, mon gros Prosper. . . .*

VIII.

FROM DR. RUDOLF STAUB, IN PARIS, TO DR. JULIUS
HIRSCH, AT GÖTTINGEN.

MY DEAR BROTHER IN SCIENCE—I resume my hasty notes, of which I sent you the first instalment some weeks ago. I mentioned then that I intended to leave my hotel, not finding it sufficiently local and national. It was kept by a Pomeranian, and the waiters, without exception, were from the Fatherland. I fancied myself at Berlin, Unter den Linden, and I reflected that, having taken the serious step of visiting the head-quarters of the Gallic genius, I should try and project myself, as much as possible, into the circumstances which are in part the consequence and in part the cause of its irrepressible

activity. It seemed to me that there could be no well-grounded knowledge without this preliminary operation of placing myself in relations, as slightly as possible modified by elements proceeding from a different combination of causes, with the spontaneous home-life of the country.

I accordingly engaged a room in the house of a lady of pure French extraction and education, who supplements the shortcomings of an income insufficient to the ever-growing demands of the Parisian system of sense-gratification, by providing food and lodging for a limited number of distinguished strangers. I should have preferred to have my room alone in the house, and to take my meals in a brewery, of very good appearance, which I speedily discovered in the same street ; but this arrangement, though very lucidly proposed by myself, was not acceptable to the mistress of the establishment (a woman with a mathematical head), and I have consoled myself for the extra expense by fixing my thoughts upon the opportunity that conformity to the customs of the house gives me of studying the table-manners of my companions, and of observing the French nature at a peculiarly physiological moment, the moment when the satisfaction of the *taste*, which is the governing quality in its composition, produces a kind of exhalation, an intellectual transpiration, which, though light and perhaps invisible to a superficial spectator, is nevertheless appreciable by a properly adjusted instrument.

I have adjusted my instrument very satisfactorily (I mean the one I carry in my good square German head), and I am not afraid of losing a single drop of this valuable fluid, as it condenses itself upon the plate of my observation. A prepared surface is what I need, and I have prepared my surface.

Unfortunately here, also, I find the individual native in the minority. There are only four French persons in the house—the individuals concerned in its management, three of whom are women, and one a man. This pre-

ponderance of the feminine element is, however, in itself characteristic, as I need not remind you what an abnormally-developed part this sex has played in French history. The remaining figure is apparently that of a man, but I hesitate to classify him so superficially. He appears to me less human than simian, and whenever I hear him talk I seem to myself to have paused in the street to listen to the shrill clatter of a hand-organ, to which the gambols of a hairy *homunculus* form an accompaniment.

I mentioned to you before that my expectation of rough usage, in consequence of my German nationality, had proved completely unfounded. No one seems to know or to care what my nationality is, and I am treated, on the contrary, with the civility which is the portion of every traveller who pays the bill without scanning the items too narrowly. This, I confess, has been something of a surprise to me, and I have not yet made up my mind as to the fundamental cause of the anomaly. My determination to take up my abode in a French interior was largely dictated by the supposition that I should be substantially disagreeable to its inmates. I wished to observe the different forms taken by the irritation that I should naturally produce; for it is under the influence of irritation that the French character most completely expresses itself. My presence, however, does not appear to operate as a stimulus, and in this respect I am materially disappointed. They treat me as they treat every one else; whereas, in order to be treated differently, I was resigned in advance to be treated worse. I have not, as I say, fully explained to myself this logical contradiction; but this is the explanation to which I tend. The French are so exclusively occupied with the idea of themselves, that in spite of the very definite image the German personality presented to them by the war of 1870, they have at present no distinct apprehension of its existence. They are not very sure that there are any Germans; they have already forgotten the con-

vincing proofs of the fact that were presented to them nine years ago. A German was something disagreeable, which they determined to keep out of their conception of things. I therefore think that we are wrong to govern ourselves upon the hypothesis of the *revanche*; the French nature is too shallow for that large and powerful plant to bloom in it.

The English-speaking specimens, too, I have not been willing to neglect the opportunity to examine; and among these I have paid special attention to the American varieties, of which I find here several singular examples. The two most remarkable are a young man who presents all the characteristics of a period of national decadence; reminding me strongly of some diminutive Hellenised Roman of the third century. He is an illustration of the period of culture in which the faculty of appreciation has obtained such a preponderance over that of production that the latter sinks into a kind of rank sterility, and the mental condition becomes analogous to that of a malarious bog. I learn from him that there is an immense number of Americans exactly resembling him, and that the city of Boston, indeed, is almost exclusively composed of them. (He communicated this fact very proudly, as if it were greatly to the credit of his native country; little perceiving the truly sinister impression it made upon me.)

What strikes one in it is that it is a phenomenon to the best of my knowledge—and you know what my knowledge is—unprecedented and unique in the history of mankind; the arrival of a nation at an ultimate stage of evolution without having passed through the mediate one; the passage of the fruit, in other words, from crudity to rottenness, without the interposition of a period of useful (and ornamental) ripeness. With the Americans, indeed, the crudity and the rottenness are identical and simultaneous; it is impossible to say, as in the conversation of this deplorable young man, which is

one and which is the other; they are inextricably mingled. I prefer the talk of the French *homunculus*; it is at least more amusing.

It is interesting in this manner to perceive, so largely developed, the germs of extinction in the so-called powerful Anglo-Saxon family. I find them in almost as recognisable a form in a young woman from the State of Maine, in the province of New England, with whom I have had a good deal of conversation. She differs somewhat from the young man I just mentioned, in that the faculty of production, of action, is, in her, less inanimate; she has more of the freshness and vigour that we suppose to belong to a young civilisation. But unfortunately she produces nothing but evil, and her tastes and habits are similarly those of a Roman lady of the lower Empire. She makes no secret of them, and has, in fact, elaborated a complete system of licentious behaviour. As the opportunities she finds in her own country do not satisfy her, she has come to Europe "to try," as she says, "for herself." It is the doctrine of universal experience professed with a cynicism that is really most extraordinary, and which, presenting itself in a young woman of considerable education, appears to me to be the judgment of a society.

Another observation which pushes me to the same induction—that of the premature vitiation of the American population—is the attitude of the Americans whom I have before me with regard to each other. There is another young lady here, who is less abnormally developed than the one I have just described, but who yet bears the stamp of this peculiar combination of incompleteness and effeteness. These three persons look with the greatest mistrust and aversion upon each other; and each has repeatedly taken me apart and assured me, secretly, that he or she only is the real, the genuine, the typical American. A type that has lost itself before it has been fixed—what can you look for from this?

Add to this that there are two young Englanders in the house, who hate all the Americans in a lump, making between them none of the distinctions and favourable comparisons which they insist upon, and you will, I think, hold me warranted in believing that, between precipitate decay and internecine enmities, the English-speaking family is destined to consume itself, and that with its decline the prospect of general pervasiveness, to which I alluded above, will brighten for the deep-lunged children of the Fatherland !

IX.

MIRANDA HOPE TO HER MOTHER.

October 22d.

DEAR MOTHER—I am off in a day or two to visit some new country ; I haven't yet decided which. I have satisfied myself with regard to France, and obtained a good knowledge of the language. I have enjoyed my visit to Madame de Maisonrouge deeply, and feel as if I were leaving a circle of real friends. Everything has gone on beautifully up to the end, and every one has been as kind and attentive as if I were their own sister, especially Mr. Verdier, the French gentleman, from whom I have gained more than I ever expected (in six weeks), and with whom I have promised to *correspond*. So you can imagine me dashing off the most correct French letters ; and, if you don't believe it, I will keep the rough draft to show you when I go back.

The German gentleman is also more interesting, the more you know him ; it seems sometimes as if I could fairly drink in his ideas. I have found out why the young lady from New York doesn't like me ! It is because I said one day at dinner that I *admired* to go to the Louvre.

Well, when I first came, it seemed as if I *did* admire everything !

Tell William Platt his letter has come. I knew he would have to write, and I was bound I would make him ! I haven't decided what country I will visit yet ; it seems as if there were so many to choose from. But I shall take care to pick out a good one, and to meet plenty of fresh experiences.

Dearest mother, my money holds out, and it *is* most interesting !

THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY



THE DIARY OF A MAN OF FIFTY.

FLORENCE, *April 5th*, 1874.—They told me I should find Italy greatly changed ; and in seven-and-twenty years there is room for changes. But to me everything is so perfectly the same that I seem to be living my youth over again ; all the forgotten impressions of that enchanting time come back to me. At the moment they were powerful enough ; but they afterwards faded away. What in the world became of them ? Whatever becomes of such things, in the long intervals of consciousness ? Where do they hide themselves away ? in what unvisited cupboards and crannies of our being do they preserve themselves ? They are like the lines of a letter written in sympathetic ink ; hold the letter to the fire for a while and the grateful warmth brings out the invisible words. It is the warmth of this yellow sun of Florence that has been restoring the text of my own young romance ; the thing has been lying before me to-day as a clear, fresh page. There have been moments during the last ten years when I have felt so portentously old, so fagged and finished, that I should have taken as a very bad joke any intimation that this present sense of juvenility was still in store for me. It won't last, at any rate ; so I had better make the best of it. But I confess it surprises me. I have led too serious a life ; but that perhaps,

after all, preserves one's youth. At all events, I have travelled too far, I have worked too hard, I have lived in brutal climates and associated with tiresome people. When a man has reached his fifty-second year without being, materially, the worse for wear—when he has fair health, a fair fortune, a tidy conscience and a complete exemption from embarrassing relatives—I suppose he is bound, in delicacy, to write himself happy. But I confess I shirk this obligation. I have not been miserable; I won't go so far as to say that—or at least as to write it. But happiness—positive happiness—would have been something different. I don't know that it would have been better, by all measurements—that it would have left me better off at the present time. But it certainly would have made this difference—that I should not have been reduced, in pursuit of pleasant images, to disinter a buried episode of more than a quarter of a century ago. I should have found entertainment more—what shall I call it?—more contemporaneous. I should have had a wife and children, and I should not be in the way of making, as the French say, infidelities to the present. Of course it's a great gain to have had an escape, not to have committed an act of thumping folly; and I suppose that, whatever serious step one might have taken at twenty-five, after a struggle, and with a violent effort, and however one's conduct might appear to be justified by events, there would always remain a certain element of regret; a certain sense of loss lurking in the sense of gain; a tendency to wonder, rather wishfully, what *might* have been. What might have been, in this case, would, without doubt, have been very sad, and what has been has been very cheerful and comfortable; but there are nevertheless two or three questions I might ask myself. Why, for instance, have I never married—why have I never been able to care for any woman as I cared for that one? Ah, why are the mountains blue and why is the sunshine warm? Happi-

ness mitigated by impertinent conjectures—that's about my ticket.

6th.—I knew it wouldn't last ; it's already passing away. But I have spent a delightful day ; I have been strolling all over the place. Everything reminds me of something else, and yet of itself at the same time ; my imagination makes a great circuit and comes back to the starting-point. There is that well-remembered odour of spring in the air, and the flowers, as they used to be, are gathered into great sheaves and stacks, all along the rugged base of the Strozzi Palace. I wandered for an hour in the Boboli Gardens ; we went there several times together. I remember all those days individually ; they seem to me as yesterday. I found the corner where she always chose to sit—the bench of sun-warmed marble, in front of the screen of ilex, with that exuberant statue of Pomona just beside it. The place is exactly the same, except that poor Pomona has lost one of her tapering fingers. I sat there for half an hour, and it was strange how near to me she seemed. The place was perfectly empty—that is, it was filled with *her*. I closed my eyes and listened ; I could almost hear the rustle of her dress on the gravel. Why do we make such an ado about death ? What is it, after all, but a sort of refinement of life ? She died ten years ago, and yet, as I sat there in the sunny stillness, she was a palpable, audible presence. I went afterwards into the gallery of the palace, and wandered for an hour from room to room. The same great pictures hung in the same places, and the same dark frescoes arched above them. Twice, of old, I went there with her ; she had a great understanding of art. She understood all sorts of things. Before the Madonna of the Chair I stood a long time. The face is not a particle like hers, and yet it reminded me of her. But everything does that. We stood and looked at it together once for half an hour ; I remember perfectly what she said.

8th.—Yesterday I felt blue—blue and bored ; and when I got up this morning I had half a mind to leave Florence. But I went out into the street, beside the Arno, and looked up and down—looked at the yellow river and the violet hills, and then decided to remain—or rather, I decided nothing. I simply stood gazing at the beauty of Florence, and before I had gazed my fill I was in good-humour again, and it was too late to start for Rome. I strolled along the quay, where something presently happened that rewarded me for staying. I stopped in front of a little jeweller's shop, where a great many objects in mosaic were exposed in the window ; I stood there for some minutes—I don't know why, for I have no taste for mosaic. In a moment a little girl came and stood beside me—a little girl with a frowsy Italian head, carrying a basket. I turned away, but, as I turned, my eyes happened to fall on her basket. It was covered with a napkin, and on the napkin was pinned a piece of paper, inscribed with an address. This address caught my glance—there was a name on it I knew. It was very legibly written—evidently by a scribe who had made up in zeal what was lacking in skill. *Contessa Salvi-Scarabelli, Via Ghibellina*—so ran the superscription ; I looked at it for some moments ; it caused me a sudden emotion. Presently the little girl, becoming aware of my attention, glanced up at me, wondering, with a pair of timid brown eyes.

“Are you carrying your basket to the Countess Salvi?” I asked.

The child stared at me. “To the Countess Scarabelli.”

“Do you know the Countess?”

“Know her?” murmured the child, with an air of small dismay.

“I mean, have you seen her?”

“Yes, I have seen her.” And then, in a moment, with a sudden soft smile—“*E bella!*” said the little girl. She was beautiful herself as she said it.

"Precisely ; and is she fair or dark ?"

The child kept gazing at me. "*Bionda—bionda*," she answered, looking about into the golden sunshine for a comparison.

"And is she young ?"

"She is not young—like me. But she is not old like—like——"

"Like me, eh ? And is she married ?"

The little girl began to look wise. "I have never seen the Signor Conte."

"And she lives in Via Ghibellina ?"

"*Sicuro*. In a beautiful palace."

I had one more question to ask, and I pointed it with certain copper coins. "Tell me a little—is she good ?"

The child inspected a moment the contents of her little brown fist. "It's you who are good," she answered.

"Ah, but the Countess ?" I repeated.

My informant lowered her big brown eyes, with an air of conscientious meditation that was inexpressibly quaint. "To me she appears so," she said at last, looking up.

"Ah, then, she must be so," I said, "because, for your age, you are very intelligent." And having delivered myself of this compliment I walked away and left the little girl counting her *soldi*.

I walked back to the hotel, wondering how I could learn something about the Contessa Salvi-Scarabelli. In the doorway I found the innkeeper, and near him stood a young man whom I immediately perceived to be a compatriot, and with whom, apparently, he had been in conversation.

"I wonder whether you can give me a piece of information," I said to the landlord. "Do you know anything about the Count Salvi-Scarabelli ?"

The landlord looked down at his boots, then slowly raised his shoulders, with a melancholy smile. "I have many regrets, dear sir——"

"You don't know the name?"

"I know the name, assuredly. But I don't know the gentleman."

I saw that my question had attracted the attention of the young Englishman, who looked at me with a good deal of earnestness. He was apparently satisfied with what he saw, for he presently decided to speak.

"The Count Scarabelli is dead," he said, very gravely.

I looked at him a moment; he was a pleasing young fellow. "And his widow lives," I observed, "in Via Ghibellina?"

"I daresay that is the name of the street." He was a handsome young Englishman, but he was also an awkward one; he wondered who I was and what I wanted, and he did me the honour to perceive that, as regards these points, my appearance was reassuring. But he hesitated, very properly, to talk with a perfect stranger about a lady whom he knew, and he had not the art to conceal his hesitation. I instantly felt it to be singular that though he regarded me as a perfect stranger, I had not the same feeling about him. Whether it was that I had seen him before, or simply that I was struck with his agreeable young face—at any rate, I felt myself, as they say here, in sympathy with him. If I have seen him before I don't remember the occasion, and neither, apparently, does he; I suppose it's only a part of the feeling I have had the last three days about everything. It was this feeling that made me suddenly act as if I had known him a long time.

"Do you know the Countess Salvi?" I asked.

He looked at me a little, and then, without resenting the freedom of my question—"The Countess Scarabelli, you mean," he said.

"Yes," I answered; "she's the daughter."

"The daughter is a little girl."

"She must be grown up now. She must be—let me see—close upon thirty."

My young Englishman began to smile. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"I was speaking of the daughter," I said, understanding his smile. "But I was thinking of the mother."

"Of the mother?"

"Of a person I knew twenty-seven years ago—the most charming woman I have ever known. She was the Countess Salvi—she lived in a wonderful old house in Via Ghibellina."

"A wonderful old house!" my young Englishman repeated.

"She had a little girl," I went on; "and the little girl was very fair, like her mother; and the mother and daughter had the same name—Bianca." I stopped and looked at my companion, and he blushed a little. "And Bianca Salvi," I continued, "was the most charming woman in the world." He blushed a little more, and I laid my hand on his shoulder. "Do you know why I tell you this? Because you remind me of what I was when I knew her—when I loved her." My poor young Englishman gazed at me with a sort of embarrassed and fascinated stare, and still I went on. "I say that's the reason I told you this—but you'll think it a strange reason. You remind me of my younger self. You needn't resent that—I was a charming young fellow. The Countess Salvi thought so. Her daughter thinks the same of you."

Instantly, instinctively, he raised his hand to my arm. "Truly?"

"Ah, you are wonderfully like me!" I said, laughing. "That was just my state of mind. I wanted tremendously to please her." He dropped his hand and looked away, smiling, but with an air of ingenuous confusion which quickened my interest in him. "You don't know what to make of me," I pursued. "You don't know why a stranger should suddenly address you in this way and pretend to read your thoughts. Doubtless you think

me a little cracked. Perhaps I am eccentric ; but it's not so bad as that. I have lived about the world a great deal, following my profession, which is that of a soldier. I have been in India, in Africa, in Canada, and I have lived a good deal alone. That inclines people, I think, to sudden bursts of confidence. A week ago I came into Italy, where I spent six months when I was your age. I came straight to Florence—I was eager to see it again, on account of associations. They have been crowding upon me ever so thickly. I have taken the liberty of giving you a hint of them." The young man inclined himself a little, in silence, as if he had been struck with a sudden respect. He stood and looked away for a moment at the river and the mountains. "It's very beautiful," I said.

"Oh, it's enchanting," he murmured.

"That's the way I used to talk. But that's nothing to you."

He glanced at me again. "On the contrary, I like to hear."

"Well, then, let us take a walk. If you too are staying at this inn, we are fellow-travellers. We will walk down the Arno to the Cascine. There are several things I should like to ask of you."

My young Englishman assented with an air of almost filial confidence, and we strolled for an hour beside the river and through the shady alleys of that lovely wilderness. We had a great deal of talk : it's not only myself, it's my whole situation over again.

"Are you very fond of Italy?" I asked.

He hesitated a moment. "One can't express that."

"Just so ; I couldn't express it. I used to try—I used to write verses. On the subject of Italy I was very ridiculous."

"So am I ridiculous," said my companion.

"No, my dear boy," I answered, "we are not ridiculous ; we are two very reasonable, superior people."

"The first time one comes—as I have done—it's a revelation."

"Oh, I remember well; one never forgets it. It's an introduction to beauty."

"And it must be a great pleasure," said my young friend, "to come back."

"Yes, fortunately the beauty is always here. What form of it," I asked, "do you prefer?"

My companion looked a little mystified; and at last he said, "I am very fond of the pictures."

"So was I. And among the pictures, which do you like best?"

"Oh, a great many."

"So did I; but I had certain favourites."

Again the young man hesitated a little, and then he confessed that the group of painters he preferred, on the whole, to all others, was that of the early Florentines.

I was so struck with this that I stopped short. "That was exactly my taste!" And then I passed my hand into his arm and we went our way again.

We sat down on an old stone bench in the Cascine, and a solemn blank-eyed Hermes, with wrinkles accentuated by the dust of ages, stood above us and listened to our talk.

"The Countess Salvi died ten years ago," I said.

My companion admitted that he had heard her daughter say so.

"After I knew her she married again," I added.

"The Count Salvi died before I knew her—a couple of years after their marriage."

"Yes, I have heard that."

"And what else have you heard?"

My companion stared at me; he had evidently heard nothing.

"She was a very interesting woman—there are a great many things to be said about her. Later, perhaps, I will tell you. Has the daughter the same charm?"

"You forget," said my young man, smiling, "that I have never seen the mother."

"Very true. I keep confounding. But the daughter—how long have you known her?"

"Only since I have been here. A very short time."

"A week?"

For a moment he said nothing. "A month."

"That's just the answer I should have made. A week, a month—it was all the same to me."

"I think it is more than a month," said the young man.

"It's probably six. How did you make her acquaintance?"

"By a letter—an introduction given me by a friend in England."

"The analogy is complete," I said. "But the friend who gave me my letter to Madame de Salvi died many years ago. He, too, admired her greatly. I don't know why it never came into my mind that her daughter might be living in Florence. Somehow I took for granted it was all over. I never thought of the little girl; I never heard what had become of her. I walked past the palace yesterday and saw that it was occupied; but I took for granted it had changed hands."

"The Countess Scarabelli," said my friend, "brought it to her husband as her marriage-portion."

"I hope he appreciated it! There is a fountain in the court, and there is a charming old garden beyond it. The Countess's sitting-room looks into that garden. The staircase is of white marble, and there is a medallion by Luca della Robbia set into the wall at the place where it makes a bend. Before you come into the drawing-room you stand a moment in a great vaulted place hung round with faded tapestry, paved with bare tiles, and furnished only with three chairs. In the drawing-room, above the fireplace, is a superb Andrea del Sarto. The furniture is covered with pale sea-green."

My companion listened to all this.

"The Andrea del Sarto is there; it's magnificent. But the furniture is in pale red."

"Ah, they have changed it, then—in twenty-seven years."

"And there's a portrait of Madame de Salvi," continued my friend.

I was silent a moment. "I should like to see that."

He too was silent. Then he asked, "Why don't you go and see it? If you knew the mother so well, why don't you call upon the daughter?"

"From what you tell me I am afraid."

"What have I told you to make you afraid?"

I looked a little at his ingenuous countenance.

"The mother was a very dangerous woman."

The young Englishman began to blush again. "The daughter is not," he said.

"Are you very sure?"

He didn't say he was sure, but he presently inquired in what way the Countess Salvi had been dangerous.

"You must not ask me that," I answered; "for after all, I desire to remember only what was good in her." And as we walked back I begged him to render me the service of mentioning my name to his friend, and of saying that I had known her mother well, and that I asked permission to come and see her.

9th.—I have seen that poor boy half a dozen times again, and a most amiable young fellow he is. He continues to represent to me, in the most extraordinary manner, my own young identity; the correspondence is perfect at all points, save that he is a better boy than I. He is evidently acutely interested in his Countess, and leads quite the same life with her that I led with Madame de Salvi. He goes to see her every evening and stays half the night; these Florentines keep the most extraordinary hours. I remember, towards 3 A.M., Madame de Salvi used to turn me out.—"Come, come,"

she would say, "it's time to go. If you were to stay later people might talk." I don't know at what time he comes home, but I suppose his evening seems as short as mine did. To-day he brought me a message from his Contessa—a very gracious little speech. She remembered often to have heard her mother speak of me—she called me her English friend. All her mother's friends were dear to her, and she begged I would do her the honour to come and see her. She is always at home of an evening. Poor young Stanmer (he is of the Devonshire Stanmers—a great property) reported this speech verbatim, and of course it can't in the least signify to him that a poor grizzled, battered soldier, old enough to be his father, should come to call upon his *inammorata*. But I remember how it used to matter to me when other men came; that's a point of difference. However, it's only because I'm so old. At twenty-five I shouldn't have been afraid of myself at fifty-two. Camerino was thirty-four—and then the others! She was always at home in the evening, and they all used to come. They were old Florentine names. But she used to let me stay after them all; she thought an old English name as good. What a transcendent coquette! . . . But *basta così*, as she used to say. I meant to go to-night to Casa Salvi, but I couldn't bring myself to the point. I don't know what I'm afraid of; I used to be in a hurry enough to go there once. I suppose I am afraid of the very look of the place—of the old rooms, the old walls. I shall go to-morrow night. I am afraid of the very echoes.

10th.—She has the most extraordinary resemblance to her mother. When I went in I was tremendously startled; I stood staring at her. I have just come home; it is past midnight; I have been all the evening at Casa Salvi. It is very warm—my window is open—I can look out on the river gliding past in the starlight. So, of old, when I came home, I used to stand and look out. There are the same cypresses on the opposite hills.

Poor young Stanmer was there, and three or four other admirers ; they all got up when I came in. I think I had been talked about, and there was some curiosity. But why should I have been talked about ? They were all youngish men—none of them of my time. She is a wonderful likeness of her mother ; I couldn't get over it. Beautiful like her mother, and yet with the same faults in her face ; but with her mother's perfect head and brow and sympathetic, almost pitying, eyes. Her face has just that peculiarity of her mother's, which, of all human countenances that I have ever known, was the one that passed most quickly and completely from the expression of gaiety to that of repose. Repose in her face always suggested sadness ; and while you were watching it with a kind of awe, and wondering of what tragic secret it was the token, it kindled, on the instant, into a radiant Italian smile. The Countess Scarabelli's smiles to-night, however, were almost uninterrupted. She greeted me—divinely, as her mother used to do ; and young Stanmer sat in the corner of the sofa—as I used to do—and watched her while she talked. She is thin and very fair, and was dressed in light, vaporous black : that completes the resemblance. The house, the rooms, are almost absolutely the same ; there may be changes of detail, but they don't modify the general effect. There are the same precious pictures on the walls of the salon—the same great dusky fresco in the concave ceiling. The daughter is not rich, I suppose, any more than the mother. The furniture is worn and faded, and I was admitted by a solitary servant, who carried a twinkling taper before me up the great dark marble staircase.

"I have often heard of you," said the Countess, as I sat down near her ; "my mother often spoke of you."

"Often ?" I answered. "I am surprised at that."

"Why are you surprised ? Were you not good friends ?"

"Yes, for a certain time—very good friends. But I was sure she had forgotten me."

"She never forgot," said the Countess, looking at me intently and smiling. "She was not like that."

"She was not like most other women in any way," I declared.

"Ah, she was charming," cried the Countess, rattling open her fan. "I have always been very curious to see you. I have received an impression of you."

"A good one, I hope."

She looked at me, laughing, and not answering this: it was just her mother's trick.

"'My Englishman,' she used to call you—'*il mio Inglese*.'"

"I hope she spoke of me kindly," I insisted.

The Countess, still laughing, gave a little shrug, balancing her hand to and fro. "So-so; I always supposed you had had a quarrel. You don't mind my being frank like this—eh?"

"I delight in it; it reminds me of your mother."

"Every one tells me that. But I am not clever like her. You will see for yourself."

"That speech," I said, "completes the resemblance. She was always pretending she was not clever, and in reality——"

"In reality she was an angel, eh? To escape from dangerous comparisons I will admit, then, that I am clever. That will make a difference. But let us talk of you. You are very—how shall I say it?—very eccentric."

"Is that what your mother told you?"

"To tell the truth, she spoke of you as a great original. But aren't all Englishmen eccentric? All except that one!" and the Countess pointed to poor Stanmer, in his corner of the sofa.

"Oh, I know just what he is," I said.

"He's as quiet as a lamb—he's like all the world," cried the Countess.

"Like all the world—yes. He is in love with you."

She looked at me with sudden gravity. "I don't

object to your saying that for all the world—but I do for him.”

“Well,” I went on, “he is peculiar in this: he is rather afraid of you.”

Instantly she began to smile; she turned her face toward Stanmer. He had seen that we were talking about him; he coloured and got up—then came toward us.

“I like men who are afraid of nothing,” said our hostess.

“I know what you want,” I said to Stanmer. “You want to know what the Signora Contessa says about you.”

Stanmer looked straight into her face, very gravely. “I don’t care a straw what she says.”

“You are almost a match for the Signora Contessa,” I answered. “She declares she doesn’t care a pin’s head what you think.”

“I recognise the Countess’s style!” Stanmer exclaimed, turning away.

“One would think,” said the Countess, “that you were trying to make a quarrel between us.”

I watched him move away to another part of the great saloon; he stood in front of the Andrea del Sarto, looking up at it. But he was not seeing it; he was listening to what we might say. I often stood there in just that way. “He can’t quarrel with you, any more than I could have quarrelled with your mother.”

“Ah, but you did. Something painful passed between you.”

“Yes, it was painful, but it was not a quarrel. I went away one day and never saw her again. That was all.”

The Countess looked at me gravely. “What do you call it when a man does that?”

“It depends upon the case.”

“Sometimes,” said the Countess in French, “it’s a *lâcheté*.”

“Yes, and sometimes it’s an act of wisdom.”

"And sometimes," rejoined the Countess, "it's a mistake."

I shook my head. "For me it was no mistake."

She began to laugh again. "Caro Signore, you're a great original. What had my poor mother done to you?"

I looked at our young Englishman, who still had his back turned to us and was staring up at the picture. "I will tell you some other time," I said.

"I shall certainly remind you; I am very curious to know." Then she opened and shut her fan two or three times, still looking at me. What eyes they have! "Tell me a little," she went on, "if I may ask without indiscretion. Are you married?"

"No, Signora Contessa."

"Isn't that at least a mistake?"

"Do I look very unhappy?"

She dropped her head a little to one side. "For an Englishman—no!"

"Ah," said I, laughing, "you are quite as clever as your mother."

"And they tell me that you are a great soldier," she continued; "you have lived in India. It was very kind of you, so far away, to have remembered our poor dear Italy."

"One always remembers Italy; the distance makes no difference. I remembered it well the day I heard of your mother's death!"

"Ah, that was a sorrow!" said the Countess. "There's not a day that I don't weep for her. But *che vuole?* She's a saint in paradise."

"*Sicuro,*" I answered; and I looked some time at the ground. "But tell me about yourself, dear lady," I asked at last, raising my eyes. "You have also had the sorrow of losing your husband."

"I am a poor widow, as you see. *Che vuole?* My husband died after three years of marriage."

I waited for her to remark that the late Count Scarbelli was also a saint in paradise, but I waited in vain.

"That was like your distinguished father," I said.

"Yes, he too died young. I can't be said to have known him ; I was but of the age of my own little girl. But I weep for him all the more."

Again I was silent for a moment.

"It was in India too," I said presently, "that I heard of your mother's second marriage."

The Countess raised her eyebrows.

"In India, then, one hears of everything ! Did that news please you ?"

"Well, since you ask me—no."

"I understand that," said the Countess, looking at her open fan. "I shall not marry again like that."

"That's what your mother said to me," I ventured to observe.

She was not offended, but she rose from her seat and stood looking at me a moment. Then—

"You should not have gone away !" she exclaimed.

I stayed for another hour ; it is a very pleasant house. Two or three of the men who were sitting there seemed very civil and intelligent ; one of them was a major of engineers, who offered me a profusion of information upon the new organisation of the Italian army. While he talked, however, I was observing our hostess, who was talking with the others ; very little, I noticed, with her young Inglese. She is altogether charming—full of frankness and freedom, of that inimitable *disinvoltura* which in an Englishwoman would be vulgar, and which in her is simply the perfection of apparent spontaneity. But for all her spontaneity she's as subtle as a needle-point, and knows tremendously well what she is about. If she is not a consummate coquette. . . . What had she in her head when she said that I should not have gone away?—Poor little Stanmer didn't go away. I left him there at midnight.

12th.—I found him to-day sitting in the church of Santa Croce, into which I wandered to escape from the heat of the sun.

In the nave it was cool and dim ; he was staring at the blaze of candles on the great altar, and thinking, I am sure, of his incomparable Countess. I sat down beside him, and after a while, as if to avoid the appearance of eagerness, he asked me how I had enjoyed my visit to Casa Salvi, and what I thought of the *padrona*.

"I think half a dozen things," I said, "but I can only tell you one now. She's an enchantress. You shall hear the rest when we have left the church."

"An enchantress?" repeated Stanmer, looking at me askance.

He is a very simple youth, but who am I to blame him ?

"A charmer," I said ; "a fascinatress !"

He turned away, staring at the altar candles.

"An artist—an actress," I went on, rather brutally.

He gave me another glance.

"I think you are telling me all," he said.

"No, no, there is more." And we sat a long time in silence.

At last he proposed that we should go out ; and we passed in the street, where the shadows had begun to stretch themselves.

"I don't know what you mean by her being an actress," he said, as we turned homeward.

"I suppose not. Neither should I have known, if any one had said that to me."

"You are thinking about the mother," said Stanmer.

"Why are you always bringing *her* in?"

"My dear boy, the analogy is so great ; it forces itself upon me."

He stopped and stood looking at me with his modest, perplexed young face. I thought he was going to exclaim—"The analogy be hanged !"—but he said after a moment—

"Well, what does it prove?"

"I can't say it proves anything; but it suggests a great many things."

"Be so good as to mention a few," he said, as we walked on.

"You are not sure of her yourself," I began.

"Never mind that—go on with your analogy."

"That's a part of it. You *are* very much in love with her."

"That's a part of it too, I suppose?"

"Yes, as I have told you before. You are in love with her, and yet you can't make her out; that's just where I was with regard to Madame de Salvi."

"And she too was an enchantress, an actress, an artist, and all the rest of it?"

"She was the most perfect coquette I ever knew, and the most dangerous, because the most finished."

"What you mean, then, is that her daughter is a finished coquette?"

"I rather think so."

Stanmer walked along for some moments in silence.

"Seeing that you suppose me to be a—a great admirer of the Countess," he said at last, "I am rather surprised at the freedom with which you speak of her."

I confessed that I was surprised at it myself. "But it's on account of the interest I take in you."

"I am immensely obliged to you!" said the poor boy.

"Ah, of course you don't like it. That is, you like my interest—I don't see how you can help liking that; but you don't like my freedom. That's natural enough; but, my dear young friend, I want only to help you. If a man had said to me—so many years ago—what I am saying to you, I should certainly also, at first, have thought him a great brute. But after a little, I should have been grateful—I should have felt that he was helping me."

"You seem to have been very well able to help yourself," said Stanmer. "You tell me you made your escape."

"Yes, but it was at the cost of infinite perplexity—of what I may call keen suffering. I should like to save you all that."

"I can only repeat—it is really very kind of you."

"Don't repeat it too often, or I shall begin to think you don't mean it."

"Well," said Stanmer, "I think this, at any rate—that you take an extraordinary responsibility in trying to put a man out of conceit of a woman who, as he believes, may make him very happy."

I grasped his arm, and we stopped, going on with our talk like a couple of Florentines.

"Do you wish to marry her?"

He looked away, without meeting my eyes. "It's a great responsibility," he repeated.

"Before Heaven," I said, "I would have married the mother! You are exactly in my situation."

"Don't you think you rather overdo the analogy?" asked poor Stanmer.

"A little more, a little less—it doesn't matter. I believe you are in my shoes. But of course if you prefer it, I will beg a thousand pardons and leave them to carry you where they will."

He had been looking away, but now he slowly turned his face and met my eyes. "You have gone too far to retreat; what is it you know about her?"

"About this one—nothing. But about the other——"

"I care nothing about the other!"

"My dear fellow," I said, "they are mother and daughter—they are as like as two of Andrea's Madonnas."

"If they resemble each other, then, you were simply mistaken in the mother."

I took his arm and we walked on again; there seemed no adequate reply to such a charge. "Your state of

mind brings back my own so completely," I said presently. "You admire her—you adore her, and yet, secretly, you mistrust her. You are enchanted with her personal charm, her grace, her wit, her everything; and yet in your private heart you are afraid of her."

"Afraid of her?"

"Your mistrust keeps rising to the surface; you can't rid yourself of the suspicion that at the bottom of all things she is hard and cruel, and you would be immensely relieved if some one should persuade you that your suspicion is right."

Stanmer made no direct reply to this; but before we reached the hotel he said—"What did you ever know about the mother?"

"It's a terrible story," I answered.

He looked at me askance. "What did she do?"

"Come to my rooms this evening and I will tell you."

He declared he would, but he never came. Exactly the way I should have acted!

14th.—I went again, last evening, to Casa Salvi, where I found the same little circle, with the addition of a couple of ladies. Stanmer was there, trying hard to talk to one of them, but making, I am sure, a very poor business of it. The Countess—well, the Countess was admirable. She greeted me like a friend of ten years, toward whom familiarity should not have engendered a want of ceremony; she made me sit near her, and she asked me a dozen questions about my health and my occupations.

"I live in the past," I said. "I go into the galleries, into the old palaces and the churches. To-day I spent an hour in Michael Angelo's chapel at San Lorenzo."

"Ah yes, that's the past," said the Countess.

"Those things are very old."

"Twenty-seven years old," I answered.

"Twenty-seven? *Altro!*"

"I mean my own past," I said. "I went to a great many of those places with your mother."

"Ah, the pictures are beautiful," murmured the Countess, glancing at Stanmer.

"Have you lately looked at any of them?" I asked. "Have you gone to the galleries with *him*?"

She hesitated a moment, smiling. "It seems to me that your question is a little impertinent. But I think you are like that."

"A little impertinent? Never. As I say, your mother did me the honour, more than once, to accompany me to the Uffizzi."

"My mother must have been very kind to you."

"So it seemed to me at the time."

"At the time only?"

"Well, if you prefer, so it seems to me now."

"Eh," said the Countess, "she made sacrifices."

"To what, cara Signora? She was perfectly free. Your lamented father was dead—and she had not yet contracted her second marriage."

"If she was intending to marry again, it was all the more reason she should have been careful."

I looked at her a moment; she met my eyes gravely, over the top of her fan. "Are *you* very careful?" I said.

She dropped her fan with a certain violence. "Ah, yes, you are impertinent!"

"Ah no," I said. "Remember that I am old enough to be your father; that I knew you when you were three years old. I may surely ask such questions. But you are right; one must do your mother justice. She was certainly thinking of her second marriage."

"You have not forgiven her that!" said the Countess, very gravely.

"Have you?" I asked, more lightly.

"I don't judge my mother. That is a mortal sin. My stepfather was very kind to me."

"I remember him," I said; "I saw him a great many times—your mother already received him."

My hostess sat with lowered eyes, saying nothing; but she presently looked up.

"She was very unhappy with my father."

"That I can easily believe. And your stepfather—is he still living?"

"He died—before my mother."

"Did he fight any more duels?"

"He was killed in a duel," said the Countess, discreetly.

It seems almost monstrous, especially as I can give no reason for it—but this announcement, instead of shocking me, caused me to feel a strange exhilaration. Most assuredly, after all these years, I bear the poor man no resentment. Of course I controlled my manner, and simply remarked to the Countess that as his fault had been, so was his punishment. I think, however, that the feeling of which I speak was at the bottom of my saying to her that I hoped that, unlike her mother's, her own brief married life had been happy.

"If it was not," she said, "I have forgotten it now." —I wonder if the late Count Scarabelli was also killed in a duel, and if his adversary . . . Is it on the books that his adversary, as well, shall perish by the pistol? Which of those gentlemen is he, I wonder? Is it reserved for poor little Stanmer to put a bullet into him? No; poor little Stanmer, I trust, will do as I did. And yet, unfortunately for him, that woman is consummately plausible. She was wonderfully nice last evening; she was really irresistible. Such frankness and freedom, and yet something so soft and womanly; such graceful gaiety, so much of the brightness, without any of the stiffness, of good breeding, and over it all something so picturesquely simple and southern. She is a perfect Italian. But she comes honestly by it. After the talk I have just jotted down she changed her place, and the conversation for half an hour was general. Stanmer indeed said very

little ; partly, I suppose, because he is shy of talking a foreign tongue. Was I like that—was I so constantly silent ? I suspect I was when I was perplexed, and Heaven knows that very often my perplexity was extreme. Before I went away I had a few more words *tête-à-tête* with the Countess.

"I hope you are not leaving Florence yet," she said ; "you will stay a while longer ?"

I answered that I came only for a week, and that my week was over.

"I stay on from day to day, I am so much interested."

"Eh, it's the beautiful moment. I'm glad our city pleases you !"

"Florence pleases me—and I take a paternal interest in our young friend," I added, glancing at Stanmer. "I have become very fond of him."

"*Bel tipo inglese*," said my hostess. "And he is very intelligent ; he has a beautiful mind."

She stood there resting her smile and her clear, expressive eyes upon me.

"I don't like to praise him too much," I rejoined, "lest I should appear to praise myself ; he reminds me so much of what I was at his age. If your beautiful mother were to come to life for an hour she would see the resemblance."

She gave me a little amused stare.

"And yet you don't look at all like him !"

"Ah, you didn't know me when I was twenty-five. I was very handsome ! And, moreover, it isn't that, it's the mental resemblance. I was ingenuous, candid, trusting, like him."

"Trusting ? I remember my mother once telling me that you were the most suspicious and jealous of men !"

"I fell into a suspicious mood, but I was, fundamentally, not in the least addicted to thinking evil. I couldn't easily imagine any harm of any one."

"And so you mean that Mr. Stanmer is in a suspicious mood?"

"Well, I mean that his situation is the same as mine."

The Countess gave me one of her serious looks.

"Come," she said, "what was it—this famous situation of yours? I have heard you mention it before."

"Your mother might have told you, since she occasionally did me the honour to speak of me."

"All my mother ever told me was that you were a sad puzzle to her."

At this, of course, I laughed out—I laugh still as I write it.

"Well, then, that was my situation—I was a sad puzzle to a very clever woman."

"And you mean, therefore, that I am a puzzle to poor Mr. Stanmer?"

"He is racking his brains to make you out. Remember it was you who said he was intelligent."

She looked round at him, and as fortune would have it, his appearance at that moment quite confirmed my assertion. He was lounging back in his chair with an air of indolence rather too marked for a drawing-room, and staring at the ceiling with the expression of a man who has just been asked a conundrum. Madame Scarabelli seemed struck with his attitude.

"Don't you see," I said, "he can't read the riddle?"

"You yourself," she answered, "said he was incapable of thinking evil. I should be sorry to have him think any evil of me."

And she looked straight at me—seriously, appealingly—with her beautiful candid brow.

I inclined myself, smiling, in a manner which might have meant—

"How could that be possible?"

"I have a great esteem for him," she went on; "I want him to think well of me. If I am a puzzle to him, do me a little service. Explain me to him."

"Explain you, dear lady?"

"You are older and wiser than he. Make him understand me."

She looked deep into my eyes for a moment, and then she turned away.

26th.—I have written nothing for a good many days, but meanwhile I have been half a dozen times to Casa Salvi. I have seen a good deal also of my young friend—had a good many walks and talks with him. I have proposed to him to come with me to Venice for a fortnight, but he won't listen to the idea of leaving Florence. He is very happy in spite of his doubts, and I confess that in the perception of his happiness I have lived over again my own. This is so much the case that when, the other day, he at last made up his mind to ask me to tell him the wrong that Madame de Salvi had done me, I rather checked his curiosity. I told him that if he was bent upon knowing I would satisfy him, but that it seemed a pity, just now, to indulge in painful imagery.

"But I thought you wanted so much to put me out of conceit of our friend."

"I admit I am inconsistent, but there are various reasons for it. In the first place—it's obvious—I am open to the charge of playing a double game. I profess an admiration for the Countess Scarabelli, for I accept her hospitality, and at the same time I attempt to poison your mind; isn't that the proper expression? I can't exactly make up my mind to that, though my admiration for the Countess and my desire to prevent you from taking a foolish step are equally sincere. And then, in the second place, you seem to me, on the whole, so happy! One hesitates to destroy an illusion, no matter how pernicious, that is so delightful while it lasts. These are the rare moments of life. To be young and ardent, in the midst of an Italian spring, and to believe in the moral perfection of a beautiful woman—what an admir-

able situation ! Float with the current ; I'll stand on the brink and watch you."

"Your real reason is that you feel you have no case against the poor lady," said Stanmer. "You admire her as much as I do."

"I just admitted that I admired her. I never said she was a vulgar flirt ; her mother was an absolutely scientific one. Heaven knows I admired that ! It's a nice point, however, how much one is bound in honour not to warn a young friend against a dangerous woman because one also has relations of civility with the lady."

"In such a case," said Stanmer, "I would break off my relations."

I looked at him, and I think I laughed.

"Are you jealous of me, by chance?"

He shook his head emphatically.

"Not in the least ; I like to see you there, because your conduct contradicts your words."

"I have always said that the Countess is fascinating."

"Otherwise," said Stanmer, "in the case you speak of I would give the lady notice."

"Give her notice?"

"Mention to her that you regard her with suspicion, and that you propose to do your best to rescue a simple-minded youth from her wiles. That would be more loyal." And he began to laugh again.

It is not the first time he has laughed at me ; but I have never minded it, because I have always understood it.

"Is that what you recommend me to say to the Countess?" I asked.

"Recommend you !" he exclaimed, laughing again ; "I recommend nothing. I may be the victim to be rescued, but I am at least not a partner to the conspiracy. Besides," he added in a moment, "the Countess knows your state of mind."

"Has she told you so?"

Stanmer hesitated.

"She has begged me to listen to everything you may say against her. She declares that she has a good conscience."

"Ah," said I, "she's an accomplished woman!"

And it is indeed very clever of her to take that tone. Stanmer afterwards assured me explicitly that he has never given her a hint of the liberties I have taken in conversation with—what shall I call it?—with her moral nature; she has guessed them for herself. She must hate me intensely, and yet her manner has always been so charming to me! She is truly an accomplished woman!

May 4th.—I have stayed away from Casa Salvi for a week, but I have lingered on in Florence, under a mixture of impulses. I have had it on my conscience not to go near the Countess again—and yet from the moment she is aware of the way I feel about her, it is open war. There need be no scruples on either side. She is as free to use every possible art to entangle poor Stanmer more closely as I am to clip her fine-spun meshes. Under the circumstances, however, we naturally shouldn't meet very cordially. But as regards her meshes, why, after all, should I clip them? It would really be very interesting to see Stanmer swallowed up. I should like to see how he would agree with her after she had devoured him—(to what vulgar imagery, by the way, does curiosity reduce a man!) Let him finish the story in his own way, as I finished it in mine. It is the same story; but why, a quarter of a century later, should it have the same *dénouement*? Let him make his own *dénouement*.

5th.—Hang it, however, I don't want the poor boy to be miserable.

6th.—Ah, but did my *dénouement* then prove such a happy one?

7th.—He came to my room late last night; he was much excited.

"What was it she did to you?" he asked.

I answered him first with another question. "Have you quarrelled with the Countess?"

But he only repeated his own. "What was it she did to you?"

"Sit down and I'll tell you." And he sat there beside the candle, staring at me. "There was a man always there—Count Camerino."

"The man she married?"

"The man she married. I was very much in love with her, and yet I didn't trust her. I was sure that she lied; I believed that she could be cruel. Nevertheless, at moments, she had a charm which made it pure pedantry to be conscious of her faults; and while these moments lasted I would have done anything for her. Unfortunately they didn't last long. But you know what I mean; am I not describing the Scarabelli?"

"The Countess Scarabelli never lied!" cried Stanmer.

"That's just what I would have said to any one who should have made the insinuation! But I suppose you are not asking me the question you put to me just now from dispassionate curiosity."

"A man may want to know!" said the innocent fellow.

I couldn't help laughing out. "This, at any rate, is my story. Camerino was always there; he was a sort of fixture in the house. If I had moments of dislike for the divine Bianca, I had no moments of liking for him. And yet he was a very agreeable fellow, very civil, very intelligent, not in the least disposed to make a quarrel with me. The trouble, of course, was simply that I was jealous of him. I don't know, however, on what ground I could have quarrelled with him, for I had no definite rights. I can't say what I expected—I can't say what, as the matter stood, I was prepared to do. With my name and my prospects, I might perfectly have offered her my hand. I am not sure that she would have accepted

it—I am by no means clear that she wanted that. But she wanted, wanted keenly, to attach me to her; she wanted to have me about. I should have been capable of giving up everything—England, my career, my family—simply to devote myself to her, to live near her and see her every day.”

“Why didn’t you do it, then?” asked Stanmer.

“Why don’t you?”

“To be a proper rejoinder to my question,” he said, rather neatly, “yours should be asked twenty-five years hence.”

“It remains perfectly true that at a given moment I was capable of doing as I say. That was what she wanted—a rich, susceptible, credulous, convenient young Englishman established near her *en permanence*. And yet,” I added, “I must do her complete justice. I honestly believe she was fond of me.” At this Stanmer got up and walked to the window; he stood looking out a moment, and then he turned round. “You know she was older than I,” I went on. “Madame Scarabelli is older than you. One day in the garden, her mother asked me in an angry tone why I disliked Camerino; for I had been at no pains to conceal my feeling about him, and something had just happened to bring it out. ‘I dislike him,’ I said, ‘because you like him so much.’ ‘I assure you I don’t like him,’ she answered. ‘He has all the appearance of being your lover,’ I retorted. It was a brutal speech, certainly, but any other man in my place would have made it. She took it very strangely; she turned pale, but she was not indignant. ‘How can he be my lover after what he has done?’ she asked. ‘What has he done?’ She hesitated a good while, then she said: ‘He killed my husband.’ ‘Good heavens!’ I cried, ‘and you receive him!’ Do you know what she said? She said, ‘*Che vuole?*’”

“Is that all?” asked Stanmer.

“No; she went on to say that Camerino had killed

Count Salvi in a duel, and she admitted that her husband's jealousy had been the occasion of it. The Count, it appeared, was a monster of jealousy—he had led her a dreadful life. He himself, meanwhile, had been anything but irreproachable; he had done a mortal injury to a man of whom he pretended to be a friend, and this affair had become notorious. The gentleman in question had demanded satisfaction for his outraged honour; but for some reason or other (the Countess, to do her justice, did not tell me that her husband was a coward), he had not as yet obtained it. The duel with Camerino had come on first; in an access of jealous fury the Count had struck Camerino in the face; and this outrage, I know not how justly, was deemed expiable before the other. By an extraordinary arrangement (the Italians have certainly no sense of fair play) the other man was allowed to be Camerino's second. The duel was fought with swords, and the Count received a wound of which, though at first it was not expected to be fatal, he died on the following day. The matter was hushed up as much as possible for the sake of the Countess's good name, and so successfully that it was presently observed that, among the public, the other gentleman had the credit of having put his blade through M. de Salvi. This gentleman took a fancy not to contradict the impression, and it was allowed to subsist. So long as *he* consented, it was of course in Camerino's interest not to contradict it, as it left him much more free to keep up his intimacy with the Countess."

Stanmer had listened to all this with extreme attention. "Why didn't *she* contradict it?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I am bound to believe it was for the same reason. I was horrified, at any rate, by the whole story. I was extremely shocked at the Countess's want of dignity in continuing to see the man by whose hand her husband had fallen."

"The husband had been a great brute, and it was not known," said Stanmer.

"Its not being known made no difference. And as for Salvi having been a brute, that is but a way of saying that his wife, and the man whom his wife subsequently married, didn't like him."

Stanmer looked extremely meditative ; his eyes were fixed on mine. "Yes, that marriage is hard to get over. It was not becoming."

"Ah," said I, "what a long breath I drew when I heard of it ! I remember the place and the hour. It was at a hill-station in India, seven years after I had left Florence. The post brought me some English papers, and in one of them was a letter from Italy, with a lot of so-called 'fashionable intelligence.' There, among various scandals in high life, and other delectable items, I read that the Countess Bianca Salvi, famous for some years as the presiding genius of the most agreeable *salon* in Florence, was about to bestow her hand upon Count Camerino, a distinguished Bolognese. Ah, my dear boy, it was a tremendous escape ! I had been ready to marry the woman who was capable of that ! But my instinct had warned me, and I had trusted my instinct."

"'Instinct's everything,' as Falstaff says !" And Stanmer began to laugh. "Did you tell Madame de Salvi that your instinct was against her ?"

"No ; I told her that she frightened me, shocked me, horrified me."

"That's about the same thing. And what did she say ?"

"She asked me what I would have ? I called her friendship with Camerino a scandal, and she answered that her husband had been a brute. Besides, no one knew it ; therefore it was no scandal. Just *your* argument ! I retorted that this was odious reasoning, and that she had no moral sense. We had a passionate

argument, and I declared I would never see her again. In the heat of my displeasure I left Florence, and I kept my vow. I never saw her again."

"You couldn't have been much in love with her," said Stanmer.

"I was not—three months after."

"If you had been you would have come back—three days after."

"So doubtless it seems to you. All I can say is that it was the great effort of my life. Being a military man, I have had on various occasions to face the enemy. But it was not then I needed my resolution; it was when I left Florence in a post-chaise."

Stanmer turned about the room two or three times, and then he said: "I don't understand! I don't understand why she should have told you that Camerino had killed her husband. It could only damage her."

"She was afraid it would damage her more that I should think he was her lover. She wished to say the thing that would most effectually persuade me that he was not her lover—that he could never be. And then she wished to get the credit of being very frank."

"Good heavens, how you must have analysed her!" cried my companion, staring.

"There is nothing so analytic as disillusionment. But there it is. She married Camerino."

"Yes, I don't like that," said Stanmer. He was silent a while, and then he added—"Perhaps she wouldn't have done so if you had remained."

He has a little innocent way! "Very likely she would have dispensed with the ceremony," I answered, drily.

"Upon my word," he said, "you *have* analysed her!"

"You ought to be grateful to me. I have done for you what you seem unable to do for yourself."

"I don't see any Camerino in my case," he said.

"Perhaps among those gentlemen I can find one for you."

"Thank you," he cried; "I'll take care of that myself!" And he went away—satisfied, I hope.

10th.—He's an obstinate little wretch; it irritates me to see him sticking to it. Perhaps he is looking for his Camerino. I shall leave him, at any rate, to his fate; it is growing insupportably hot.

11th.—I went this evening to bid farewell to the Scarabelli. There was no one there; she was alone in her great dusky drawing-room, which was lighted only by a couple of candles, with the immense windows open over the garden. She was dressed in white; she was deucedly pretty. She asked me, of course, why I had been so long without coming.

"I think you say that only for form," I answered. "I imagine you know."

"*Ché!* what have I done?"

"Nothing at all. You are too wise for that."

She looked at me a while. "I think you are a little crazy."

"Ah no, I am only too sane. I have too much reason rather than too little."

"You have, at any rate, what we call a fixed idea."

"There is no harm in that so long as it's a good one."

"But yours is abominable!" she exclaimed, with a laugh.

"Of course you can't like me or my ideas. All things considered, you have treated me with wonderful kindness, and I thank you and kiss your hands. I leave Florence to-morrow."

"I won't say I'm sorry!" she said, laughing again. "But I am very glad to have seen you. I always wondered about you. You are a curiosity."

"Yes, you must find me so. A man who can resist your charms! The fact is, I can't. This evening you

are enchanting ; and it is the first time I have been alone with you."

She gave no heed to this ; she turned away. But in a moment she came back, and stood looking at me, and her beautiful solemn eyes seemed to shine in the dimness of the room.

"How *could* you treat my mother so?" she asked.

"Treat her so?"

"How could you desert the most charming woman in the world?"

"It was not a case of desertion ; and if it had been it seems to me she was consoled."

At this moment there was the sound of a step in the ante-chamber, and I saw that the Countess perceived it to be Stanmer's.

"That wouldn't have happened," she murmured.

"My poor mother needed a protector."

Stanmer came in, interrupting our talk, and looking at me, I thought, with a little air of bravado. He must think me indeed a tiresome, meddlesome bore ; and upon my word, turning it all over, I wonder at his docility. After all, he's five-and-twenty—and yet I *must* add, it *does* irritate me—the way he sticks ! He was followed in a moment by two or three of the regular Italians, and I made my visit short.

"Good-bye, Countess," I said ; and she gave me her hand in silence. "Do *you* need a protector?" I added, softly.

She looked at me from head to foot, and then, almost angrily—

"Yes, Signore."

But, to deprecate her anger, I kept her hand an instant, and then bent my venerable head and kissed it. I think I appeased her.

BOLOGNA, 14th.—I left Florence on the 11th, and have been here these three days. Delightful old Italian town—but it lacks the charm of my Florentine secret.

I wrote that last entry five days ago, late at night, after coming back from Casa Salvi. I afterwards fell asleep in my chair; the night was half over when I woke up. Instead of going to bed, I stood a long time at the window, looking out at the river. It was a warm, still night, and the first faint streaks of sunrise were in the sky. Presently I heard a slow footstep beneath my window, and looking down, made out by the aid of a street lamp that Stanmer was but just coming home. I called to him to come to my rooms, and, after an interval, he made his appearance.

"I want to bid you good-bye," I said; "I shall depart in the morning. Don't go to the trouble of saying you are sorry. Of course you are not; I must have bullied you immensely."

He made no attempt to say he was sorry, but he said he was very glad to have made my acquaintance.

"Your conversation," he said, with his little innocent air, "has been very suggestive."

"Have you found Camerino?" I asked, smiling.

"I have given up the search."

"Well," I said, "some day when you find that you have made a great mistake, remember I told you so."

He looked for a minute as if he were trying to anticipate that day by the exercise of his reason.

"Has it ever occurred to you that *you* may have made a great mistake?"

"Oh yes; everything occurs to one sooner or later."

That's what I said to him; but I didn't say that the question, pointed by his candid young countenance, had, for the moment, a greater force than it had ever had before.

And then he asked me whether, as things had turned out, I myself had been so especially happy.

PARIS, *December 17th*.—A note from young Stanmer, whom I saw in Florence—a remarkable little note, dated Rome, and worth transcribing.

"My dear General—I have it at heart to tell you that I was married a week ago to the Countess Salvi-Scarabelli. You talked me into a great muddle; but a month after that it was all very clear. Things that involve a risk are like the Christian faith; they must be seen from the inside.—Yours ever, E. S.

"P.S.—A fig for analogies unless you can find an analogy for my happiness!"

His happiness makes him very clever. I hope it will last!—I mean his cleverness, not his happiness.

LONDON, *April 19th, 1877.*—Last night, at Lady H——'s, I met Edmund Stanmer, who married Bianca Salvi's daughter. I heard the other day that they had come to England. A handsome young fellow, with a fresh contented face. He reminded me of Florence, which I didn't pretend to forget; but it was rather awkward, for I remember I used to disparage that woman to him. I had a complete theory about her. But he didn't seem at all stiff; on the contrary, he appeared to enjoy our encounter. I asked him if his wife were there. I had to do that.

"Oh yes, she's in one of the other rooms. Come and make her acquaintance; I want you to know her."

"You forget that I do know her."

"Oh no, you don't; you never did." And he gave a little significant laugh.

I didn't feel like facing the *ci-devant* Scarabelli at that moment; so I said that I was leaving the house, but that I would do myself the honour of calling upon his wife. We talked for a minute of something else, and then, suddenly breaking off and looking at me, he laid his hand on my arm. I must do him the justice to say that he looks felicitous.

"Depend upon it you were wrong!" he said.

"My dear young friend," I answered, "imagine the alacrity with which I concede it."

Something else again was spoken of, but in an instant he repeated his movement.

"Depend upon it you were wrong."

"I am sure the Countess has forgiven me," I said, "and in that case you ought to bear no grudge. As I have had the honour to say, I will call upon her immediately."

"I was not alluding to my wife," he answered. "I was thinking of your own story."

"My own story?"

"So many years ago. Was it not rather a mistake?"

I looked at him a moment; he's positively rosy.

"That's not a question to solve in a London crush."

And I turned away.

22d.—I haven't yet called on the *ci-devant*; I am afraid of finding her at home. And that boy's words have been thrumming in my ears—"Depend upon it you were wrong. Wasn't it rather a mistake?" *Was I wrong—was it a mistake? Was I too cautious—too suspicious—too logical? Was it really a protector she needed—a man who might have helped her? Would it have been for his benefit to believe in her, and was her fault only that I had forsaken her? Was the poor woman very unhappy? God forgive me, how the questions come crowding in! If I marred her happiness, I certainly didn't make my own. And I might have made it—eh? That's a charming discovery for a man of my age!*

EUGENE PICKERING

EUGENE PICKERING.

I.

IT was at Homburg, several years ago, before the gaming had been suppressed. The evening was very warm, and all the world was gathered on the terrace of the Kursaal and the esplanade below it to listen to the excellent orchestra ; or half the world, rather, for the crowd was equally dense in the gaming-rooms around the tables. Everywhere the crowd was great. The night was perfect, the season was at its height, the open windows of the Kursaal sent long shafts of unnatural light into the dusky woods, and now and then, in the intervals of the music, one might almost hear the clink of the napoleons and the metallic call of the croupiers rise above the watching silence of the saloons. I had been strolling with a friend, and we at last prepared to sit down. Chairs, however, were scarce. I had captured one, but it seemed no easy matter to find a mate for it. I was on the point of giving up in despair, and proposing an adjournment to the silken ottomans of the Kursaal, when I observed a young man lounging back on one of the objects of my quest, with his feet supported on the rounds of another. This was more than his share of luxury, and I promptly approached him. He evidently

belonged to the race which has the credit of knowing best, at home and abroad, how to make itself comfortable; but something in his appearance suggested that his present attitude was the result of inadvertence rather than of egotism. He was staring at the conductor of the orchestra and listening intently to the music. His hands were locked round his long legs, and his mouth was half open, with rather a foolish air. "There are so few chairs," I said, "that I must beg you to surrender this second one." He started, stared, blushed, pushed the chair away with awkward alacrity, and murmured something about not having noticed that he had it.

"What an odd-looking youth!" said my companion, who had watched me, as I seated myself beside her.

"Yes, he is odd-looking; but what is odder still is that I have seen him before, that his face is familiar to me, and yet that I can't place him." The orchestra was playing the Prayer from *Der Freischütz*, but Weber's lovely music only deepened the blank of memory. Who the deuce was he? where, when, how, had I known him? It seemed extraordinary that a face should be at once so familiar and so strange. We had our backs turned to him, so that I could not look at him again. When the music ceased we left our places, and I went to consign my friend to her mamma on the terrace. In passing, I saw that my young man had departed; I concluded that he only strikingly resembled some one I knew. But who in the world was it he resembled? The ladies went off to their lodgings, which were near by, and I turned into the gaming-rooms and hovered about the circle at roulette. Gradually I filtered through to the inner edge, near the table, and, looking round, saw my puzzling friend stationed opposite to me. He was watching the game, with his hands in his pockets; but singularly enough, now that I observed him at my leisure, the look of familiarity quite faded

from his face. What had made us call his appearance odd was his great length and leanness of limb, his long, white neck, his blue, prominent eyes, and his ingenuous, unconscious absorption in the scene before him. He was not handsome, certainly, but he looked peculiarly amiable; and if his overt wonderment savoured a trifle of rurality, it was an agreeable contrast to the hard, inexpressive masks about him. He was the verdant offshoot, I said to myself, of some ancient, rigid stem; he had been brought up in the quietest of homes, and he was having his first glimpse of life. I was curious to see whether he would put anything on the table; he evidently felt the temptation, but he seemed paralysed by chronic embarrassment. He stood gazing at the chinking complexity of losses and gains, shaking his loose gold in his pocket, and every now and then passing his hand nervously over his eyes.

Most of the spectators were too attentive to the play to have many thoughts for each other; but before long I noticed a lady who evidently had an eye for her neighbours as well as for the table. She was seated about half-way between my friend and me, and I presently observed that she was trying to catch his eye. Though at Homburg, as people said, "one could never be sure," I yet doubted whether this lady were one of those whose especial vocation it was to catch a gentleman's eye. She was youthful rather than elderly, and pretty rather than plain; indeed, a few minutes later, when I saw her smile, I thought her wonderfully pretty. She had a charming gray eye and a good deal of yellow hair disposed in picturesque disorder; and though her features were meagre and her complexion faded, she gave one a sense of sentimental, artificial gracefulness. She was dressed in white muslin very much puffed and frilled, but a trifle the worse for wear, relieved here and there by a pale blue ribbon. I used to flatter myself on guessing at people's nationality by their faces, and, as a

rule, I guessed aright. This faded, crumpled, vaporous beauty, I conceived, was a German—such a German, somehow, as I had seen imagined in literature. Was she not a friend of poets, a correspondent of philosophers, a muse, a priestess of æsthetics—something in the way of a Bettina, a Rabel? My conjectures, however, were speedily merged in wonderment as to what my diffident friend was making of her. She caught his eye at last, and raising an ungloved hand, covered altogether with blue-gemmed rings—turquoises, sapphires, and lapis—she beckoned him to come to her. The gesture was executed with a sort of practised coolness, and accompanied with an appealing smile. He stared a moment, rather blankly, unable to suppose that the invitation was addressed to him; then, as it was immediately repeated with a good deal of intensity, he blushed to the roots of his hair, wavered awkwardly, and at last made his way to the lady's chair. By the time he reached it he was crimson, and wiping his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief. She tilted back, looked up at him with the same smile, laid two fingers on his sleeve, and said something, interrogatively, to which he replied by a shake of the head. She was asking him, evidently, if he had ever played, and he was saying no. Old players have a fancy that when luck has turned her back on them they can put her into good-humour again by having their stakes placed by a novice. Our young man's physiognomy had seemed to his new acquaintance to express the perfection of inexperience, and, like a practical woman, she had determined to make him serve her turn. Unlike most of her neighbours, she had no little pile of gold before her, but she drew from her pocket a double napoleon, put it into his hand, and bade him place it on a number of his own choosing. He was evidently filled with a sort of delightful trouble; he enjoyed the adventure, but he shrank from the hazard. I would have staked the coin on its being his companion's last; for although

she still smiled intently as she watched his hesitation, there was anything but indifference in her pale, pretty face. Suddenly, in desperation, he reached over and laid the piece on the table. My attention was diverted at this moment by my having to make way for a lady with a great many flounces, before me, to give up her chair to a rustling friend to whom she had promised it ; when I again looked across at the lady in white muslin, she was drawing in a very goodly pile of gold with her little blue-gemmed claw. Good luck and bad, at the Homburg tables, were equally undemonstrative, and this happy adventuress rewarded her young friend for the sacrifice of his innocence with a single, rapid, upward smile. He had innocence enough left, however, to look round the table with a gleeful, conscious laugh, in the midst of which his eyes encountered my own. Then suddenly the familiar look which had vanished from his face flickered up unmistakably ; it was the boyish laugh of a boyhood's friend. Stupid fellow that I was, I had been looking at Eugene Pickering !

Though I lingered on for some time longer he failed to recognise me. Recognition, I think, had kindled a smile in my own face ; but, less fortunate than he, I suppose my smile had ceased to be boyish. Now that luck had faced about again, his companion played for herself—played and won, hand over hand. At last she seemed disposed to rest on her gains, and proceeded to bury them in the folds of her muslin. Pickering had staked nothing for himself, but as he saw her prepare to withdraw he offered her a double napoleon and begged her to place it. She shook her head with great decision, and seemed to bid him put it up again ; but he, still blushing a good deal, pressed her with awkward ardour, and she at last took it from him, looked at him a moment fixedly, and laid it on a number. A moment later the croupier was raking it in. She gave the young man a little nod which seemed to say, "I told you so ;" he glanced

round the table again and laughed ; she left her chair, and he made a way for her through the crowd. Before going home I took a turn on the terrace and looked down on the esplanade. The lamps were out, but the warm starlight vaguely illumined a dozen figures scattered in couples. One of these figures, I thought, was a lady in a white dress.

I had no intention of letting Pickering go without reminding him of our old acquaintance. He had been a very singular boy, and I was curious to see what had become of his singularity. I looked for him the next morning at two or three of the hotels, and at last I discovered his whereabouts. But he was out, the waiter said ; he had gone to walk an hour before. I went my way, confident that I should meet him in the evening. It was the rule with the Homburg world to spend its evenings at the Kursaal, and Pickering, apparently, had already discovered a good reason for not being an exception. One of the charms of Homburg is the fact that of a hot day you may walk about for a whole afternoon in unbroken shade. The umbrageous gardens of the Kursaal mingle with the charming Hardtwald, which in turn melts away into the wooded slopes of the Taunus Mountains. To the Hardtwald I bent my steps, and strolled for an hour through mossy glades and the still, perpendicular gloom of the fir-woods. Suddenly, on the grassy margin of a by-path, I came upon a young man stretched at his length in the sun-checked shade, and kicking his heels towards a patch of blue sky. My step was so noiseless on the turf that, before he saw me, I had time to recognise Pickering again. He looked as if he had been lounging there for some time ; his hair was tossed about as if he had been sleeping ; on the grass near him, beside his hat and stick, lay a sealed letter. When he perceived me he jerked himself forward, and I stood looking at him without introducing myself—purposely, to give him a chance to recognise me. He put on his glasses, being

awkwardly near-sighted, and stared up at me with an air of general trustfulness, but without a sign of knowing me. So at last I introduced myself. Then he jumped up and grasped my hands, and stared and blushed and laughed, and began a dozen random questions, ending with a demand as to how in the world I had known him.

"Why, you are not changed so utterly," I said; "and after all, it's but fifteen years since you used to do my Latin exercises for me."

"Not changed, eh?" he answered, still smiling, and yet speaking with a sort of ingenuous dismay.

Then I remembered that poor Pickering had been, in those Latin days, a victim of juvenile irony. He used to bring a bottle of medicine to school and take a dose in a glass of water before lunch; and every day at two o'clock, half an hour before the rest of us were liberated, an old nurse with bushy eyebrows came and fetched him away in a carriage. His extremely fair complexion, his nurse, and his bottle of medicine, which suggested a vague analogy with the sleeping-potion in the tragedy, caused him to be called Juliet. Certainly Romeo's sweetheart hardly suffered more; she was not, at least, a standing joke in Verona. Remembering these things, I hastened to say to Pickering that I hoped he was still the same good fellow who used to do my Latin for me. "We were capital friends, you know," I went on, "then and afterwards."

"Yes, we were very good friends," he said, "and that makes it the stranger I shouldn't have known you. For you know, as a boy, I never had many friends, nor as a man either. You see," he added, passing his hand over his eyes, "I am rather dazed, rather bewildered at finding myself for the first time—alone." And he jerked back his shoulders nervously, and threw up his head, as if to settle himself in an unwonted position. I wondered whether the old nurse with the bushy eyebrows had remained attached to his person up to a recent period,

and discovered presently that, virtually at least, she had. We had the whole summer day before us, and we sat down on the grass together and overhauled our old memories. It was as if we had stumbled upon an ancient cupboard in some dusky corner, and rummaged out a heap of childish playthings—tin soldiers and torn story-books, jack-knives and Chinese puzzles. This is what we remembered between us.

He had made but a short stay at school—not because he was tormented, for he thought it so fine to be at school at all that he held his tongue at home about the sufferings incurred through the medicine-bottle, but because his father thought he was learning bad manners. This he imparted to me in confidence at the time, and I remember how it increased my oppressive awe of Mr. Pickering, who had appeared to me in glimpses as a sort of high priest of the proprieties. Mr. Pickering was a widower—a fact which seemed to produce in him a sort of preternatural concentration of parental dignity. He was a majestic man, with a hooked nose, a keen dark eye, very large whiskers, and notions of his own as to how a boy—or his boy, at any rate—should be brought up. First and foremost, he was to be a “gentleman”; which seemed to mean, chiefly, that he was always to wear a muffler and gloves, and be sent to bed, after a supper of bread and milk, at eight o’clock. School-life, on experiment, seemed hostile to these observances, and Eugene was taken home again, to be moulded into urbanity beneath the parental eye. A tutor was provided for him, and a single select companion was prescribed. The choice, mysteriously, fell on me, born as I was under quite another star; my parents were appealed to, and I was allowed for a few months to have my lessons with Eugene. The tutor, I think, must have been rather a snob, for Eugene was treated like a prince, while I got all the questions and the raps with the ruler. And yet I remember never being jealous of my happier comrade, and

striking up, for the time, one of those friendships of childhood. He had a watch and a pony and a great store of picture-books, but my envy of these luxuries was tempered by a vague compassion which left me free to be generous. I could go out to play alone, I could button my jacket myself, and sit up till I was sleepy. Poor Pickering could never take a step without asking leave, or spend half an hour in the garden without a formal report of it when he came in. My parents, who had no desire to see me inoculated with importunate virtues, sent me back to school at the end of six months. After that I never saw Eugene. His father went to live in the country, to protect the lad's morals, and Eugene faded, in reminiscence, into a pale image of the depressing effects of education. I think I vaguely supposed that he would melt into thin air, and indeed began gradually to doubt of his existence, and to regard him as one of the foolish things one ceased to believe in as one grew older. It seemed natural that I should have no more news of him. Our present meeting was my first assurance that he had really survived all that muffling and coddling.

I observed him now with a good deal of interest, for he was a rare phenomenon—the fruit of a system persistently and uninterruptedly applied. He struck me, in a fashion, as certain young monks I had seen in Italy; he had the same candid, unsophisticated cloister face. His education had been really almost monastic. It had found him evidently a very compliant, yielding subject; his gentle affectionate spirit was not one of those that need to be broken. It had bequeathed him, now that he stood on the threshold of the great world, an extraordinary freshness of impression and alertness of desire, and I confess that, as I looked at him and met his transparent blue eye, I trembled for the unwarned innocence of such a soul. I became aware, gradually, that the world had already wrought a certain work upon him and roused him to a restless, troubled self-consciousness.

Everything about him pointed to an experience from which he had been debarred; his whole organism trembled with a dawning sense of unsuspected possibilities of feeling. This appealing tremor was indeed outwardly visible. He kept shifting himself about on the grass, thrusting his hands through his hair, wiping a light perspiration from his forehead, breaking out to say something and rushing off to something else. Our sudden meeting had greatly excited him, and I saw that I was likely to profit by a certain overflow of sentimental fermentation. I could do so with a good conscience, for all this trepidation filled me with a great friendliness.

"It's nearly fifteen years, as you say," he began, "since you used to call me 'butter-fingers' for always missing the ball. That's a long time to give an account of, and yet they have been, for me, such eventless, monotonous years, that I could almost tell their history in ten words. You, I suppose, have had all kinds of adventures and travelled over half the world. I remember you had a turn for deeds of daring; I used to think you a little Captain Cook in roundabouts, for climbing the garden fence to get the ball when I had let it fly over. I climbed no fences then or since. You remember my father, I suppose, and the great care he took of me? I lost him some five months ago. From those boyish days up to his death we were always together. I don't think that in fifteen years we spent half a dozen hours apart. We lived in the country, winter and summer, seeing but three or four people. I had a succession of tutors, and a library to browse about in; I assure you I am a tremendous scholar. It was a dull life for a growing boy, and a duller life for a young man grown, but I never knew it. I was perfectly happy." He spoke of his father at some length, and with a respect which I privately declined to emulate. Mr. Pickering had been, to my sense, a frigid egotist, unable to con-

ceive of any larger vocation for his son than to strive to reproduce so irreproachable a model. "I know I have been strangely brought up," said my friend, "and that the result is something grotesque; but my education, piece by piece, in detail, became one of my father's personal habits, as it were. He took a fancy to it at first through his intense affection for my mother and the sort of worship he paid her memory. She died at my birth, and as I grew up, it seems that I bore an extraordinary likeness to her. Besides, my father had a great many theories; he prided himself on his conservative opinions; he thought the usual American *laissezaller* in education was a very vulgar practice, and that children were not to grow up like dusty thorns by the wayside. "So you see," Pickering went on, smiling and blushing, and yet with something of the irony of vain regret, "I am a regular garden plant. I have been watched and watered and pruned, and if there is any virtue in tending I ought to take the prize at a flower show. Some three years ago my father's health broke down, and he was kept very much within doors. So, although I was a man grown, I lived altogether at home. If I was out of his sight for a quarter of an hour he sent some one after me. He had severe attacks of neuralgia, and he used to sit at his window, basking in the sun. He kept an opera-glass at hand, and when I was out in the garden he used to watch me with it. A few days before his death I was twenty-seven years old, and the most innocent youth, I suppose, on the continent. After he died I missed him greatly," Pickering continued, evidently with no intention of making an epigram. "I stayed at home, in a sort of dull stupor. It seemed as if life offered itself to me for the first time, and yet as if I didn't know how to take hold of it."

He uttered all this with a frank eagerness which increased as he talked, and there was a singular contrast between the meagre experience he described and a

certain radiant intelligence which I seemed to perceive in his glance and tone. Evidently he was a clever fellow, and his natural faculties were excellent. I imagined he had read a great deal, and recovered, in some degree, in restless intellectual conjecture, the freedom he was condemned to ignore in practice. Opportunity was now offering a meaning to the empty forms with which his imagination was stored, but it appeared to him dimly, through the veil of his personal diffidence.

"I have not sailed round the world, as you suppose," I said, "but I confess I envy you the novelties you are going to behold. Coming to Homburg you have plunged *in medias res*."

He glanced at me to see if my remark contained an allusion, and hesitated a moment. "Yes, I know it. I came to Bremen in the steamer with a very friendly German, who undertook to initiate me into the glories and mysteries of the Fatherland. At this season, he said, I must begin with Homburg. I landed but a fortnight ago, and here I am." Again he hesitated, as if he were going to add something about the scene at the Kursaal; but suddenly, nervously, he took up the letter which was lying beside him, looked hard at the seal with a troubled frown, and then flung it back on the grass with a sigh.

"How long do you expect to be in Europe?" I asked.

"Six months I supposed when I came. But not so long—now!" And he let his eyes wander to the letter again.

"And where shall you go—what shall you do?"

"Everywhere, everything, I should have said yesterday. But now it is different."

I glanced at the letter interrogatively, and he gravely picked it up and put it into his pocket. We talked for a while longer, but I saw that he had suddenly become preoccupied; that he was apparently weighing an impulse to break some last barrier of reserve. At last he suddenly laid his hand on my arm, looked at me a moment appeal-

ingly, and cried, "Upon my word, I should like to tell you everything!"

"Tell me everything, by all means," I answered, smiling. "I desire nothing better than to lie here in the shade and hear everything."

"Ah, but the question is, will you understand it? No matter; you think me a queer fellow already. It's not easy, either, to tell you what I feel—not easy for so queer a fellow as I to tell you in how many ways he is queer!" He got up and walked away a moment, passing his hand over his eyes, then came back rapidly and flung himself on the grass again. "I said just now I always supposed I was happy; it's true; but now that my eyes are open, I see I was only stultified. I was like a poodle-dog that is led about by a blue ribbon, and scoured and combed and fed on slops. It was not life; life is learning to know one's self, and in that sense I have lived more in the past six weeks than in all the years that preceded them. I am filled with this feverish sense of liberation; it keeps rising to my head like the fumes of strong wine. I find I am an active, sentient, intelligent creature, with desires, with passions, with possible convictions—even with what I never dreamed of, a possible will of my own! I find there is a world to know, a life to lead, men and women to form a thousand relations with. It all lies there like a great surging sea, where we must plunge and dive and feel the breeze and breast the waves. I stand shivering here on the brink, staring, longing, wondering, charmed by the smell of the brine and yet afraid of the water. The world beckons and smiles and calls, but a nameless influence from the past, that I can neither wholly obey nor wholly resist, seems to hold me back. I am full of impulses, but, somehow, I am not full of strength. Life seems inspiring at certain moments, but it seems terrible and unsafe; and I ask myself why I should wantonly measure myself with merciless forces, when I have learned so well how to stand aside and let

them pass. Why shouldn't I turn my back upon it all and go home to—what awaits me?—to that sightless, soundless country life, and long days spent among old books? But if a man *is* weak, he doesn't want to assent beforehand to his weakness; he wants to taste whatever sweetness there may be in paying for the knowledge. So it is that it comes back—this irresistible impulse to take my plunge—to let myself swing, to go where liberty leads me." He paused a moment, fixing me with his excited eyes, and perhaps perceived in my own an irrepressible smile at his perplexity. "'Swing ahead, in Heaven's name,' you want to say, 'and much good may it do you.' I don't know whether you are laughing at my scruples or at what possibly strikes you as my depravity. I doubt," he went on gravely, "whether I have an inclination toward wrong-doing; if I have, I am sure I shall not prosper in it. I honestly believe I may safely take out a license to amuse myself. But it isn't that I think of, any more than I dream of, playing with suffering. Pleasure and pain are empty words to me; what I long for is knowledge—some other knowledge than comes to us in formal, colourless, impersonal precept. You would understand all this better if you could breathe for an hour the musty in-door atmosphere in which I have always lived. To break a window and let in light and air—I feel as if at last I must *act!*"

"Act, by all means, now and always, when you have a chance," I answered. "But don't take things too hard, now or ever. Your long confinement makes you think the world better worth knowing than you are likely to find it. A man with as good a head and heart as yours has a very ample world within himself, and I am no believer in art for art, nor in what's called 'life' for life's sake. Nevertheless, take your plunge, and come and tell me whether you have found the pearl of wisdom." He frowned a little, as if he thought my sympathy a trifle meagre. I shook him by the hand and laughed.

"The pearl of wisdom," I cried, "is love; honest love in the most convenient concentration of experience! I advise you to fall in love." He gave me no smile in response, but drew from his pocket the letter of which I have spoken, held it up, and shook it solemnly. "What is it?" I asked.

"It is my sentence!"

"Not of death, I hope!"

"Of marriage."

"With whom?"

"With a person I don't love."

This was serious. I stopped smiling, and begged him to explain.

"It is the singular part of my story," he said at last. "It will remind you of an old-fashioned romance. Such as I sit here, talking in this wild way, and tossing off provocations to destiny, my destiny is settled and sealed. I am engaged, I am given in marriage. It's a bequest of the past—the past I had no hand in! The marriage was arranged by my father, years ago, when I was a boy. The young girl's father was his particular friend; he was also a widower, and was bringing up his daughter, on his side, in the same severe seclusion in which I was spending my days. To this day I am unacquainted with the origin of the bond of union between our respective progenitors. Mr. Vernor was largely engaged in business, and I imagine that once upon a time he found himself in a financial strait and was helped through it by my father's coming forward with a heavy loan, on which, in his situation, he could offer no security but his word. Of this my father was quite capable. He was a man of dogmas, and he was sure to have a rule of life—as clear as if it had been written out in his beautiful copper-plate hand—adapted to the conduct of a gentleman toward a friend in pecuniary embarrassment. What is more, he was sure to adhere to it. Mr. Vernor, I believe, got on his feet, paid his debt, and vowed my father an eternal

gratitude. His little daughter was the apple of his eye, and he pledged himself to bring her up to be the wife of his benefactor's son. So our fate was fixed, parentally, and we have been educated for each other. I have not seen my betrothed since she was a very plain-faced little girl in a sticky pinafore, hugging a one-armed doll—of the male sex, I believe—as big as herself. Mr. Vernor is in what is called the Eastern trade, and has been living these many years at Smyrna. Isabel has grown up there in a white-walled garden, in an orange grove, between her father and her governess. She is a good deal my junior; six months ago she was seventeen; when she is eighteen we are to marry."

He related all this calmly enough, without the accent of complaint, drily rather and doggedly, as if he were weary of thinking of it. "It's a romance, indeed, for these dull days," I said, "and I heartily congratulate you. It's not every young man who finds, on reaching the marrying age, a wife kept in a box of rose-leaves for him. A thousand to one Miss Vernor is charming; I wonder you don't post off to Smyrna."

"You are joking," he answered, with a wounded air, "and I am terribly serious. Let me tell you the rest. I never suspected this superior conspiracy till something less than a year ago. My father, wishing to provide against his death, informed me of it very solemnly. I was neither elated nor depressed; I received it, as I remember, with a sort of emotion which varied only in degree from that with which I could have hailed the announcement that he had ordered me a set of new shirts. I supposed that was the way that all marriages were made; I had heard of their being made in heaven, and what was my father but a divinity? Novels and poems, indeed, talked about falling in love; but novels and poems were one thing and life was another. A short time afterwards he introduced me to a photograph of my predestined, who has a pretty, but an extremely inani-

mate, face. After this his health failed rapidly. One night I was sitting, as I habitually sat for hours, in his dimly-lighted room, near his bed, to which he had been confined for a week. He had not spoken for some time, and I supposed he was asleep; but happening to look at him I saw his eyes wide open, and fixed on me strangely. He was smiling benignantly, intensely, and in a moment he beckoned to me. Then, on my going to him—‘I feel that I shall not last long,’ he said; ‘but I am willing to die when I think how comfortably I have arranged your future.’ He was talking of death, and anything but grief at that moment was doubtless impious and monstrous; but there came into my heart for the first time a throbbing sense of being over-governed. I said nothing, and he thought my silence was all sorrow. ‘I shall not live to see you married,’ he went on, ‘but since the foundation is laid, that little signifies; it would be a selfish pleasure, and I have never thought of myself but in you. To foresee your future, in its main outline, to know to a certainty that you will be safely domiciled here, with a wife approved by my judgment, cultivating the moral fruit of which I have sown the seed—this will content me. But, my son, I wish to clear this bright vision from the shadow of a doubt. I believe in your docility; I believe I may trust the salutary force of your respect for my memory. But I must remember that when I am removed you will stand here alone, face to face with a hundred nameless temptations to perversity. The fumes of unrighteous pride may rise into your brain and tempt you, in the interest of a vulgar theory which it will call your independence, to shatter the edifice I have so laboriously constructed. So I must ask you for a promise—the solemn promise you owe my condition.’ And he grasped my hand. ‘You will follow the path I have marked; you will be faithful to the young girl whom an influence as devoted as that which has governed your own young life has moulded into everything amiable;

you will marry Isabel Vernor.' This was pretty 'steep,' as we used to say at school. I was frightened; I drew away my hand and asked to be trusted without any such terrible vow. My reluctance startled my father into a suspicion that the vulgar theory of independence had already been whispering to me. He sat up in his bed and looked at me with eyes which seemed to foresee a lifetime of odious ingratitude. I felt the reproach; I feel it now. I promised! And even now I don't regret my promise nor complain of my father's tenacity. I feel, somehow, as if the seeds of ultimate repose had been sown in those unsuspecting years—as if after many days I might gather the mellow fruit. But after many days! I will keep my promise, I will obey; but I want to *live* first!"

✓ "My dear fellow, you are living now. All this passionate consciousness of your situation is a very ardent life. I wish I could say as much for my own."

"I want to forget my situation. I want to spend three months without thinking of the past or the future, grasping whatever the present offers me. Yesterday I thought I was in a fair way to sail with the tide. But this morning comes this memento!" And he held up his letter again.

"What is it?"

"A letter from Smyrna."

"I see you have not yet broken the seal."

"No; nor do I mean to, for the present. It contains bad news."

"What do you call bad news?"

"News that I am expected in Smyrna in three weeks. News that Mr. Vernor disapproves of my roving about the world. News that his daughter is standing expectant at the altar."

"Is not this pure conjecture?"

"Conjecture, possibly, but safe conjecture. As soon as I looked at the letter something smote me at the heart.

Look at the device on the seal, and I am sure you will find it's *Tarry not!*" And he flung the letter on the grass.

"Upon my word, you had better open it," I said.

"If I were to open it and read my summons, do you know what I should do? I should march home and ask the Oberkellner how one gets to Smyrna, pack my trunk, take my ticket, and not stop till I arrived. I know I should; it would be the fascination of habit. The only way, therefore, to wander to my rope's end is to leave the letter unread."

"In your place," I said, "curiosity would make me open it."

He shook his head. "I have no curiosity! For a long time now the idea of my marriage has ceased to be a novelty, and I have contemplated it mentally in every possible light. I fear nothing from that side, but I do fear something from conscience. I want my hands tied. Will you do me a favour? Pick up the letter, put it into your pocket, and keep it till I ask you for it. When I do, you may know that I am at my rope's end."

I took the letter, smiling. "And how long is your rope to be? The Homburg season doesn't last for ever."

"Does it last a month? Let that be my season! A month hence you will give it back to me."

"To-morrow if you say so. Meanwhile, let it rest in peace!" And I consigned it to the most sacred interstice of my pocket-book. To say that I was disposed to humour the poor fellow would seem to be saying that I thought his request fantastic. It was his situation, by no fault of his own, that was fantastic, and he was only trying to be natural. He watched me put away the letter, and when it had disappeared gave a soft sigh of relief. The sigh was natural, and yet it set me thinking. His general recoil from an immediate responsibility imposed by others might be wholesome enough; but if there was an old grievance on one side, was there not possibly a

new-born delusion on the other? It would be unkind to withhold a reflection that might serve as a warning; so I told him, abruptly, that I had been an undiscovered spectator, the night before, of his exploits at roulette.

He blushed deeply, but he met my eyes with the same clear good-humour.

"Ah, then, you saw that wonderful lady?"

"Wonderful she was indeed. I saw her afterwards, too, sitting on the terrace in the starlight. I imagine she was not alone."

"No, indeed, I was with her—for nearly an hour. Then I walked home with her."

"Ah! And did you go in?"

"No, she said it was too late to ask me; though she remarked that in a general way she did not stand upon ceremony."

"She did herself injustice. When it came to losing your money for you, she made you insist."

"Ah, you noticed that too?" cried Pickering, still quite unconfused. "I felt as if the whole table were staring at me; but her manner was so gracious and reassuring that I supposed she was doing nothing unusual. She confessed, however, afterwards, that she is very eccentric. The world began to call her so, she said, before she ever dreamed of it, and at last finding that she had the reputation, in spite of herself, she resolved to enjoy its privileges. Now, she does what she chooses."

"In other words, she is a lady with no reputation to lose!"

Pickering seemed puzzled; he smiled a little. "Is not that what you say of bad women?"

"Of some—of those who are found out."

"Well," he said, still smiling, "I have not yet found out Madame Blumenthal."

"If that's her name, I suppose she's German."

"Yes; but she speaks English so well that you

wouldn't know it. She is very clever. Her husband is dead."

I laughed involuntarily at the conjunction of these facts, and Pickering's clear glance seemed to question my mirth. "You have been so bluntly frank with me," I said, "that I too must be frank. Tell me, if you can, whether this clever Madame Blumenthal, whose husband is dead, has given a point to your desire for a suspension of communication with Smyrna."

He seemed to ponder my question, unshrinkingly. "I think not," he said, at last. "I have had the desire for three months; I have known Madame Blumenthal for less than twenty-four hours."

"Very true. But when you found this letter of yours on your place at breakfast, did you seem for a moment to see Madame Blumenthal sitting opposite?"

"Opposite?"

"Opposite, my dear fellow, or anywhere in the neighbourhood. In a word, does she interest you?"

"Very much!" he cried, joyously.

"Amen!" I answered, jumping up with a laugh.

"And now, if we are to see the world in a month, there is no time to lose. Let us begin with the Hardtwald."

Pickering rose, and we strolled away into the forest, talking of lighter things. At last we reached the edge of the wood, sat down on a fallen log, and looked out across an interval of meadow at the long wooded waves of the Taunus. What my friend was thinking of I can't say; I was meditating on his queer biography, and letting my wonderment wander away to Smyrna. Suddenly I remembered that he possessed a portrait of the young girl who was waiting for him there in a white-walled garden. I asked him if he had it with him. He said nothing, but gravely took out his pocket-book and drew forth a small photograph. It represented, as the poet says, a simple maiden in her flower—a slight young girl, with a certain childish roundness of contour. There was no ease in her

posture ; she was standing, stiffly and shyly, for her likeness ; she wore a short-waisted white dress ; her arms hung at her sides and her hands were clasped in front ; her head was bent downward a little, and her dark eyes fixed. But her awkwardness was as pretty as that of some angular seraph in a mediæval carving, and in her timid gaze there seemed to lurk the questioning gleam of childhood. "What is this for?" her charming eyes appeared to ask ; "why have I been dressed up for this ceremony in a white frock and amber beads?"

"Gracious powers !" I said to myself ; "what an enchanting thing is innocence !"

"That portrait was taken a year and a half ago," said Pickering, as if with an effort to be perfectly just. "By this time, I suppose, she looks a little wiser."

"Not much, I hope," I said, as I gave it back. "She is very sweet !"

"Yes, poor girl, she is very sweet—no doubt !" And he put the thing away without looking at it.

We were silent for some moments. At last, abruptly—"My dear fellow," I said, "I should take some satisfaction in seeing you immediately leave Homburg."

"Immediately?"

"To-day—as soon as you can get ready."

He looked at me, surprised, and little by little he blushed. "There is something I have not told you," he said ; "something that your saying that Madame Blumenthal has no reputation to lose has made me half afraid to tell you."

"I think I can guess it. Madame Blumenthal has asked you to come and play her game for her again."

"Not at all !" cried Pickering, with a smile of triumph. "She says that she means to play no more for the present. She has asked me to come and take tea with her this evening."

"Ah, then," I said, very gravely, "of course you can't leave Homburg."

He answered nothing, but looked askance at me, as if he were expecting me to laugh. "Urge it strongly," he said in a moment. "Say it's my duty—that I *must*."

I didn't quite understand him, but, feathering the shaft with a harmless expletive, I told him that unless he followed my advice I would never speak to him again.

He got up, stood before me, and struck the ground with his stick. "Good!" he cried; "I wanted an occasion to break a rule—to leap a barrier. Here it is. I stay!"

I made him a mock bow for his energy. "That's very fine," I said; "but now, to put you in a proper mood for Madame Blumenthal's tea, we will go and listen to the band play Schubert under the lindens." And we walked back through the woods.

I went to see Pickering the next day, at his inn, and on knocking, as directed, at his door, was surprised to hear the sound of a loud voice within. My knock remained unnoticed, so I presently introduced myself. I found no company, but I discovered my friend walking up and down the room and apparently declaiming to himself from a little volume bound in white vellum. He greeted me heartily, threw his book on the table, and said that he was taking a German lesson.

"And who is your teacher?" I asked, glancing at the book.

He rather avoided meeting my eye, as he answered, after an instant's delay, "Madame Blumenthal."

"Indeed! Has she written a grammar?"

"It's not a grammar; it's a tragedy." And he handed me the book.

I opened it, and beheld, in delicate type, with a very large margin, an *Historisches Trauerspiel* in five acts, entitled "Cleopatra." There were a great many marginal corrections and annotations, apparently from the author's hand; the speeches were very long, and there was an inordinate number of soliloquies by the heroine. One of

them, I remember, towards the end of the play, began in this fashion—

“What, after all, is life but sensation, and sensation but deception?—reality that pales before the light of one’s dreams as Octavia’s dull beauty fades beside mine? But let me believe in some intenser bliss, and seek it in the arms of death!”

“It seems decidedly passionate,” I said. “Has the tragedy ever been acted?”

“Never in public; but Madame Blumenthal tells me that she had it played at her own house in Berlin, and that she herself undertook the part of the heroine.”

Pickering’s unworldly life had not been of a sort to sharpen his perception of the ridiculous, but it seemed to me an unmistakable sign of his being under the charm, that this information was very soberly offered. He was preoccupied, he was irresponsive to my experimental observations on vulgar topics—the hot weather, the inn, the advent of Adelina Patti. At last, uttering his thoughts, he announced that Madame Blumenthal had proved to be an extraordinarily interesting woman. He seemed to have quite forgotten our long talk in the Hartwaldt, and betrayed no sense of this being a confession that he had taken his plunge and was floating with the current. He only remembered that I had spoken slightly of the lady, and he now hinted that it behoved me to amend my opinion. I had received the day before so strong an impression of a sort of spiritual fastidiousness in my friend’s nature, that on hearing now the striking of a new hour, as it were, in his consciousness, and observing how the echoes of the past were immediately quenched in its music, I said to myself that it had certainly taken a delicate hand to wind up that fine machine. No doubt Madame Blumenthal was a clever woman. It is a good German custom at Homburg to spend the hour preceding dinner in listening to the orchestra in the Kurgarten; Mozart and Beethoven, for organisms in which the inter-

fusion of soul and sense is peculiarly mysterious, are a vigorous stimulus to the appetite. Pickering and I conformed, as we had done the day before, to the fashion, and when we were seated under the trees, he began to expatiate on his friend's merits.

"I don't know whether she is eccentric or not," he said ; "to me every one seems eccentric, and it's not for me, yet a while, to measure people by my narrow precedents. I never saw a gaming table in my life before, and supposed that a gambler was of necessity some dusky villain with an evil eye. In Germany, says Madame Blumenthal, people play at roulette as they play at billiards, and her own venerable mother originally taught her the rules of the game. It is a recognised source of subsistence for decent people with small means. But I confess Madame Blumenthal might do worse things than play at roulette, and yet make them harmonious and beautiful. I have never been in the habit of thinking positive beauty the most excellent thing in a woman. I have always said to myself that if my heart were ever to be captured it would be by a sort of general grace—a sweetness of motion and tone—on which one could count for soothing impressions, as one counts on a musical instrument that is perfectly in tune. Madame Blumenthal has it—this grace that soothes and satisfies ; and it seems the more perfect that it keeps order and harmony in a character really passionately ardent and active. With her eager nature and her innumerable accomplishments nothing would be easier than that she should seem restless and aggressive. You will know her, and I leave you to judge whether she does seem so ! She has every gift, and culture has done everything for each. What goes on in her mind I of course can't say ; what reaches the observer—the admirer—is simply a sort of fragrant emanation of intelligence and sympathy."

"Madame Blumenthal," I said, smiling, "might be the loveliest woman in the world, and you the object of

her choicest favours, and yet what I should most envy you would be, not your peerless friend, but your beautiful imagination."

"That's a polite way of calling me a fool," said Pickering. "You are a sceptic, a cynic, a satirist! I hope I shall be a long time coming to that."

"You will make the journey fast if you travel by express trains. But pray tell me, have you ventured to intimate to Madame Blumenthal your high opinion of her?"

"I don't know what I may have said. She listens even better than she talks, and I think it possible I may have made her listen to a great deal of nonsense. For after the first few words I exchanged with her I was conscious of an extraordinary evaporation of all my old diffidence. I have, in truth, I suppose," he added in a moment, "owing to my peculiar circumstances, a great accumulated fund of unuttered things of all sorts to get rid of. Last evening, sitting there before that charming woman, they came swarming to my lips. Very likely I poured them all out. I have a sense of having enshrouded myself in a sort of mist of talk, and of seeing her lovely eyes shining through it opposite to me, like fog-lamps at sea." And here, if I remember rightly, Pickering broke off into an ardent parenthesis, and declared that Madame Blumenthal's eyes had something in them that he had never seen in any others. "It was a jumble of crudities and inanities," he went on; "they must have seemed to her great rubbish; but I felt the wiser and the stronger, somehow, for having fired off all my guns—they could hurt nobody now if they hit—and I imagine I might have gone far without finding another woman in whom such an exhibition would have provoked so little of mere cold amusement."

"Madame Blumenthal, on the contrary," I surmised, "entered into your situation with warmth."

"Exactly so—the greatest! She has felt and suffered, and now she understands!"

"She told you, I imagine, that she understood you as if she had made you, and she offered to be your guide, philosopher, and friend."

"She spoke to me," Pickering answered, after a pause, "as I had never been spoken to before, and she offered me, formally, all the offices of a woman's friendship."

"Which you as formally accepted?"

"To you the scene sounds absurd, I suppose, but allow me to say I don't care!" Pickering spoke with an air of genial defiance which was the most inoffensive thing in the world. "I was very much moved; I was, in fact, very much excited. I tried to say something, but I couldn't; I had had plenty to say before, but now I stammered and bungled, and at last I bolted out of the room."

"Meanwhile she had dropped her tragedy into your pocket!"

"Not at all. I had seen it on the table before she came in. Afterwards she kindly offered to read German aloud with me, for the accent, two or three times a week. 'What shall we begin with?' she asked. 'With this!' I said, and held up the book. And she let me take it to look it over."

I was neither a cynic nor a satirist, but even if I had been, I might have been disarmed by Pickering's assurance, before we parted, that Madame Blumenthal wished to know me and expected him to introduce me. Among the foolish things which, according to his own account, he had uttered, were some generous words in my praise, to which she had civilly replied. I confess I was curious to see her, but I begged that the introduction should not be immediate, for I wished to let Pickering work out his destiny alone. For some days I saw little of him, though we met at the Kursaal and strolled occasionally in the park. I watched, in spite of my desire to let him alone, for the signs and portents of the world's action upon

him—of that portion of the world, in especial, of which Madame Blumenthal had constituted herself the agent. He seemed very happy, and gave me in a dozen ways an impression of increased self-confidence and maturity. His mind was admirably active, and always, after a quarter of an hour's talk with him, I asked myself what experience could really do, that innocence had not done, to make it bright and fine. I was struck with his deep enjoyment of the whole spectacle of foreign life—its novelty, its picturesqueness, its light and shade—and with the infinite freedom with which he felt he could go and come and rove and linger and observe it all. It was an expansion, an awakening, a coming to moral manhood. Each time I met him he spoke a little less of Madame Blumenthal; but he let me know generally that he saw her often, and continued to admire her. I was forced to admit to myself, in spite of preconceptions, that if she were really the ruling star of this happy season, she must be a very superior woman. Pickering had the air of an ingenuous young philosopher sitting at the feet of an austere muse, and not of a sentimental spendthrift dangling about some supreme incarnation of levity.

II.

MADAME BLUMENTHAL seemed, for the time, to have abjured the Kursaal, and I never caught a glimpse of her. Her young friend, apparently, was an interesting study, and the studious mind prefers seclusion.

She reappeared, however, at last, one evening at the opera, where from my chair I perceived her in a box, looking extremely pretty. Adelina Patti was singing, and after the rising of the curtain I was occupied with the stage; but on looking round when it fell for the *entr'acte*,

I saw that the authoress of "Cleopatra" had been joined by her young admirer. He was sitting a little behind her, leaning forward, looking over her shoulder and listening, while she, slowly moving her fan to and fro and letting her eye wander over the house, was apparently talking of this person and that. No doubt she was saying sharp things; but Pickering was not laughing; his eyes were following her covert indications; his mouth was half open, as it always was when he was interested; he looked intensely serious. I was glad that, having her back to him, she was unable to see how he looked. It seemed the proper moment to present myself and make her my bow; but just as I was about to leave my place a gentleman, whom in a moment I perceived to be an old acquaintance, came to occupy the next chair. Recognition and mutual greetings followed, and I was forced to postpone my visit to Madame Blumenthal. I was not sorry, for it very soon occurred to me that Niedermeyer would be just the man to give me a fair prose version of Pickering's lyric tributes to his friend. He was an Austrian by birth, and had formerly lived about Europe a great deal in a series of small diplomatic posts. England especially he had often visited, and he spoke the language almost without accent. I had once spent three rainy days with him in the house of an English friend in the country. He was a sharp observer, and a good deal of a gossip; he knew a little something about every one, and about some people everything. His knowledge on social matters generally had the quality of all German science; it was copious, minute, exhaustive.

"Do tell me," I said, as we stood looking round the house, "who and what is the lady in white, with the young man sitting behind her."

"Who?" he answered, dropping his glass. "Madame Blumenthal! What! It would take long to say. Be introduced; it's easily done; you will find her charming. Then, after a week, you will tell me what she is."

"Perhaps I should not. My friend there has known her a week, and I don't think he is yet able to give a coherent account of her."

He raised his glass again, and after looking a while, "I am afraid your friend is a little—what do you call it?—a little 'soft.' Poor fellow! he's not the first. I have never known this lady that she has not had some eligible youth hovering about in some such attitude as that, undergoing the softening process. She looks wonderfully well, from here. It's extraordinary how those women last!"

"You don't mean, I take it, when you talk about 'those women,' that Madame Blumenthal is not embalmed, for duration, in a certain infusion of respectability?"

"Yes and no. The atmosphere that surrounds her is entirely of her own making. There is no reason in her antecedents that people should drop their voice when they speak of her. But some women are never at their ease till they have given some damnable twist or other to their position before the world. The attitude of upright virtue is unbecoming, like sitting too straight in a fauteuil. Don't ask me for opinions, however; content yourself with a few facts and with an anecdote. Madame Blumenthal is Prussian, and very well born. I remember her mother, an old Westphalian Gräfin, with principles marshalled out like Frederick the Great's grenadiers. She was poor, however, and her principles were an insufficient dowry for Anastasia, who was married very young to a vicious Jew, twice her own age. He was supposed to have money, but I am afraid he had less than was nominated in the bond, or else that his pretty young wife spent it very fast. She has been a widow these six or eight years, and has lived, I imagine, in rather a hand-to-mouth fashion. I suppose she is some six or eight and thirty years of age. In winter one hears of her in Berlin, giving little suppers to the artistic rabble there; in summer one often sees her across the green table at Ems and Wiesbaden. She's very clever, and her clever-

ness has spoiled her. A year after her marriage she published a novel, with her views on matrimony, in the George Sand manner—beating the drum to Madame Sand's trumpet. No doubt she was very unhappy; Blumenthal was an old beast. Since then she has published a lot of literature—novels and poems and pamphlets on every conceivable theme, from the conversion of Lola Montez to the Hegelian philosophy. Her talk is much better than her writing. Her *conjugophobia*—I can't call it by any other name—made people think lightly of her at a time when her rebellion against marriage was probably only theoretic. She had a taste for spinning fine phrases, she drove her shuttle, and when she came to the end of her yarn she found that society had turned its back. She tossed her head, declared that at last she could breathe the sacred air of freedom, and formally announced that she had embraced an 'intellectual' life. This meant unlimited *camaraderie* with scribblers and daubers, Hegelian philosophers and Hungarian pianists. But she has been admired also by a great many really clever men; there was a time, in fact, when she turned a head as well set on its shoulders as this one!" And Niedermeyer tapped his forehead. "She has a great charm, and, literally, I know no harm of her. Yet for all that, I am not going to speak to her; I am not going near her box. I am going to leave her to say, if she does me the honour to observe the omission, that I too have gone over to the Philistines. It's not that; it is that there is something sinister about the woman. I am too old for it to frighten me, but I am good-natured enough for it to pain me. Her quarrel with society has brought her no happiness, and her outward charm is only the mask of a dangerous discontent. Her imagination is lodged where her heart should be! So long as you amuse it, well and good; she's radiant. But the moment you let it flag, she is capable of dropping you without a pang. If you land on your feet you are so much the wiser,

simply ; but there have been two or three, I believe, who have almost broken their necks in the fall."

"You are reversing your promise," I said, "and giving me an opinion, but not an anecdote."

"This is my anecdote. A year ago a friend of mine made her acquaintance in Berlin, and though he was no longer a young man, and had never been what is called a susceptible one, he took a great fancy to Madame Blumenthal. He's a major in the Prussian artillery—grizzled, grave, a trifle severe, a man every way firm in the faith of his fathers. It's a proof of Anastasia's charm that such a man should have got into the habit of going to see her every day of his life. But the major was in love, or next door to it ! Every day that he called he found her scribbling away at a little ormolu table on a lot of half-sheets of note-paper. She used to bid him sit down and hold his tongue for a quarter of an hour, till she had finished her chapter ; she was writing a novel, and it was promised to a publisher. Clorinda, she confided to him, was the name of the injured heroine. The major, I imagine, had never read a work of fiction in his life, but he knew by hearsay that Madame Blumenthal's literature, when put forth in pink covers, was subversive of several respectable institutions. Besides, he didn't believe in women knowing how to write at all, and it irritated him to see this inky goddess correcting proof-sheets under his nose—irritated him the more that, as I say, he was in love with her and that he ventured to believe she had a kindness for his years and his honours. And yet she was not such a woman as he could easily ask to marry him. The result of all this was that he fell into the way of railing at her intellectual pursuits and saying he should like to run his sword through her pile of papers. A woman was clever enough when she could guess her husband's wishes, and learned enough when she could read him the newspapers. At last, one day, Madame Blumenthal flung down her pen and announced in triumph that she

had finished her novel. Clorinda had expired in the arms of—some one else than her husband. The major, by way of congratulating her, declared that her novel was immoral rubbish, and that her love of vicious paradoxes was only a peculiarly depraved form of coquetry. He added, however, that he loved her in spite of her follies, and that if she would formally abjure them he would as formally offer her his hand. They say that women like to be snubbed by military men. I don't know, I'm sure ; I don't know how much pleasure, on this occasion, was mingled with Anastasia's wrath. But her wrath was very quiet, and the major assured me it made her look uncommonly pretty. 'I have told you before,' she says, 'that I write from an inner need. I write to unburden my heart, to satisfy my conscience. You call my poor efforts coquetry, vanity, the desire to produce a sensation. I can prove to you that it is the quiet labour itself I care for, and not the world's more or less flattering attention to it !' And seizing the history of Clorinda she thrust it into the fire. The major stands staring, and the first thing he knows she is sweeping him a great curtsey and bidding him farewell for ever. Left alone and recovering his wits, he fishes out Clorinda from the embers, and then proceeds to thump vigorously at the lady's door. But it never opened, and from that day to the day three months ago when he told me the tale, he had not beheld her again."

"By Jove, it's a striking story," I said. "But the question is, what does it prove?"

"Several things. First (what I was careful not to tell my friend), that Madame Blumenthal cared for him a trifle more than he supposed ; second, that he cares for her more than ever ; third, that the performance was a master-stroke, and that her allowing him to force an interview upon her again is only a question of time."

"And last?" I asked.

"This is another anecdote. The other day, Unter den

Linden, I saw on a bookseller's counter a little pink-covered romance—'Sophronia,' by Madame Blumenthal. Glancing through it, I observed an extraordinary abuse of asterisks; every two or three pages the narrative was adorned with a portentous blank, crossed with a row of stars."

"Well, but poor Clorinda?" I objected, as Niedermeyer paused.

"Sophronia, my dear fellow, is simply Clorinda renamed by the baptism of fire. The fair author came back, of course, and found Clorinda tumbled upon the floor, a good deal scorched, but, on the whole, more frightened than hurt. She picks her up, brushes her off, and sends her to the printer. Wherever the flames had burnt a hole she swings a constellation! But if the major is prepared to drop a penitent tear over the ashes of Clorinda, I shall not whisper to him that the urn is empty."

Even Adelina Patti's singing, for the next half-hour, but half availed to divert me from my quickened curiosity to behold Madame Blumenthal face to face. As soon as the curtain had fallen again I repaired to her box and was ushered in by Pickering with zealous hospitality. His glowing smile seemed to say to me, "Ay, look for yourself, and adore!" Nothing could have been more gracious than the lady's greeting, and I found, somewhat to my surprise, that her prettiness lost nothing on a nearer view. Her eyes indeed were the finest I have ever seen—the softest, the deepest, the most intensely responsive. In spite of something faded and jaded in her physiognomy, her movements, her smile, and the tone of her voice, especially when she laughed, had an almost girlish frankness and spontaneity. She looked at you very hard with her radiant gray eyes, and she indulged while she talked in a superabundance of restless, rather affected little gestures, as if to make you take her meaning in a certain very particular and superfine sense. I wondered whether after a while this might not

fatigue one's attention ; then meeting her charming eyes, I said, Not for a long time. She was very clever, and, as Pickering had said, she spoke English admirably. I told her, as I took my seat beside her, of the fine things I had heard about her from my friend, and she listened, letting me go on some time, and exaggerate a little, with her fine eyes fixed full upon me. "Really?" she suddenly said, turning short round upon Pickering, who stood behind us, and looking at him in the same way. "Is that the way you talk about me?"

He blushed to his eyes, and I repented. She suddenly began to laugh ; it was then I observed how sweet her voice was in laughter. We talked after this of various matters, and in a little while I complimented her on her excellent English, and asked if she had learnt it in England.

"Heaven forbid !" she cried. "I have never been there and wish never to go. I should never get on with the—" I wondered what she was going to say ; the fogs, the smoke, or whist with sixpenny stakes?—"I should never get on," she said, "with the aristocracy ! I am a fierce democrat—I am not ashamed of it. I hold opinions which would make my ancestors turn in their graves. I was born in the lap of feudalism. I am a daughter of the crusaders. But I am a revolutionist ! I have a passion for freedom—my idea of happiness is to die on a great barricade ! It's to your great country I should like to go. I should like to see the wonderful spectacle of a great people free to do everything it chooses, and yet never doing anything wrong !"

I replied, modestly, that, after all, both our freedom and our good conduct had their limits, and she turned quickly about and shook her fan with a dramatic gesture at Pickering. "No matter, no matter !" she cried ; "I should like to see the country which produced that wonderful young man. I think of it as a sort of Arcadia—a land of the golden age. He's so delightfully

innocent ! In this stupid old Germany, if a young man is innocent he's a fool ; he has no brains ; he's not a bit interesting. But Mr. Pickering says the freshest things, and after I have laughed five minutes at their freshness it suddenly occurs to me that they are very wise, and I think them over for a week. " True ! " she went on, nodding at him. " I call them inspired solecisms, and I treasure them up. Remember that when I next laugh at you ! "

Glancing at Pickering, I was prompted to believe that he was in a state of beatific exaltation which weighed Madame Blumenthal's smiles and frowns in an equal balance. They were equally hers ; they were links alike in the golden chain. He looked at me with eyes that seemed to say, " Did you ever hear such wit ? Did you ever see such grace ? " It seemed to me that he was but vaguely conscious of the meaning of her words ; her gestures, her voice and glance, made an absorbing harmony. There is something painful in the spectacle of absolute enthralment, even to an excellent cause. I gave no response to Pickering's challenge, but made some remark upon the charm of Adelina Patti's singing. Madame Blumenthal, as became a " revolutionist, " was obliged to confess that she could see no charm in it ; it was meagre, it was trivial, it lacked soul. " You must know that in music, too, " she said, " I think for myself ! " And she began with a great many flourishes of her fan to explain what it was she thought. Remarkable things, doubtless ; but I cannot answer for it, for in the midst of the explanation the curtain rose again. " You can't be a great artist without a great passion ! " Madame Blumenthal was affirming. Before I had time to assent Madame Patti's voice rose wheeling like a skylark, and rained down its silver notes. " Ah, give me that art, " I whispered, " and I will leave you your passion ! " And I departed for my own place in the orchestra. I wondered afterwards whether the speech

had seemed rude, and inferred that it had not on receiving a friendly nod from the lady, in the lobby, as the theatre was emptying itself. She was on Pickering's arm, and he was taking her to her carriage. Distances are short in Homburg, but the night was rainy, and Madame Blumenthal exhibited a very pretty satin-shod foot as a reason why, though but a penniless widow, she should not walk home. Pickering left us together a moment while he went to hail the vehicle, and my companion seized the opportunity, as she said, to beg me to be so very kind as to come and see her. It was for a particular reason! It was reason enough for me, of course, I answered, that she had given me leave. She looked at me a moment with that extraordinary gaze of hers which seemed so absolutely audacious in its candour, and rejoined that I paid more compliments than our young friend there, but that she was sure I was not half so sincere. "But it's about him I want to talk," she said. "I want to ask you many things; I want you to tell me all about him. He interests me; but you see my sympathies are so intense, my imagination is so lively, that I don't trust my own impressions. They have misled me more than once!" And she gave a little tragic shudder.

I promised to come and compare notes with her, and we bade her farewell at her carriage door. Pickering and I remained a while, walking up and down the long glazed gallery of the Kursaal. I had not taken many steps before I became aware that I was beside a man in the very extremity of love. "Isn't she wonderful?" he asked, with an implicit confidence in my sympathy which it cost me some ingenuity to elude. If he were really in love, well and good! For although, now that I had seen her, I stood ready to confess to large possibilities of fascination on Madame Blumenthal's part, and even to certain possibilities of sincerity of which my appreciation was vague, yet it seemed to me less ominous

that he should be simply smitten than that his admiration should pique itself on being discriminating. It was on his fundamental simplicity that I counted for a happy termination of his experiment, and the former of these alternatives seemed to me the simpler. I resolved to hold my tongue and let him run his course. He had a great deal to say about his happiness; about the days passing like hours, the hours like minutes, and about Madame Blumenthal being a "revelation." "She was nothing to-night," he said; "nothing to what she sometimes is in the way of brilliancy—in the way of repartee. If you could only hear her when she tells her adventures!"

"Adventures?" I inquired. "Has she had adventures?"

"Of the most wonderful sort!" cried Pickering, with rapture. "She hasn't vegetated, like me! She has lived in the tumult of life. When I listen to her reminiscences, it's like hearing the opening tumult of one of Beethoven's symphonies as it loses itself in a triumphant harmony of beauty and faith!"

I could only lift my eyebrows, but I desired to know before we separated what he had done with that troublesome conscience of his. "I suppose you know, my dear fellow," I said, "that you are simply in love. That's what they happen to call your state of mind."

He replied with a brightening eye, as if he were delighted to hear it—"So Madame Blumenthal told me only this morning!" And seeing, I suppose, that I was slightly puzzled, "I went to drive with her," he continued; "we drove to Königstein, to see the old castle. We scrambled up into the heart of the ruin and sat for an hour in one of the crumbling old courts. Something in the solemn stillness of the place unloosed my tongue; and while she sat on an ivied stone, on the edge of the plunging wall, I stood there and made a speech. She listened to me, looking at me, breaking off little bits of stone and letting them drop down into

the valley. At last she got up and nodded at me two or three times silently, with a smile, as if she were applauding me for a solo on the violin. 'You are in love,' she said. 'It's a perfect case !' And for some time she said nothing more. But before we left the place she told me that she owed me an answer to my speech. She thanked me heartily, but she was afraid that if she took me at my word she would be taking advantage of my inexperience. I had known few women ; I was too easily pleased ; I thought her better than she really was. She had great faults ; I must know her longer and find them out ; I must compare her with other women—women younger, simpler, more innocent, more ignorant ; and then if I still did her the honour to think well of her, she would listen to me again. I told her that I was not afraid of preferring any woman in the world to her, and then she repeated, 'Happy man, happy man ! you are in love, you are in love !' "

I called upon Madame Blumenthal a couple of days later, in some agitation of thought. It has been proved that there are, here and there, in the world, such people as sincere impostors ; certain characters who cultivate fictitious emotions in perfect good faith. Even if this clever lady enjoyed poor Pickering's bedazzlement, it was conceivable that, taking vanity and charity together, she should care more for his welfare than for her own entertainment ; and her offer to abide by the result of hazardous comparison with other women was a finer stroke than her reputation had led me to expect. She received me in a shabby little sitting-room littered with uncut books and newspapers, many of which I saw at a glance were French. One side of it was occupied by an open piano, surmounted by a jar full of white roses. They perfumed the air ; they seemed to me to exhale the pure aroma of Pickering's devotion. Buried in an arm-chair, the object of this devotion was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. The purpose of my visit was

not to admire Madame Blumenthal on my own account, but to ascertain how far I might safely leave her to work her will upon my friend. She had impugned my sincerity the evening of the opera, and I was careful on this occasion to abstain from compliments, and not to place her on her guard against my penetration. It is needless to narrate our interview in detail; indeed, to tell the perfect truth, I was punished for my rash attempt to surprise her by a temporary eclipse of my own perspicacity. She sat there so questioning, so perceptive, so genial, so generous, and so pretty withal, that I was quite ready at the end of half an hour to subscribe to the most comprehensive of Pickering's rhapsodies. She was certainly a wonderful woman. I have never liked to linger, in memory, on that half-hour. The result of it was to prove that there were many more things in the composition of a woman who, as Niedermeyer said, had lodged her imagination in the place of her heart than were dreamt of in my philosophy. Yet, as I sat here stroking my hat and balancing the account between nature and art in my affable hostess, I felt like a very competent philosopher. She had said she wished me to tell her everything about our friend, and she questioned me as to his family, his fortune, his antecedents, and his character. All this was natural in a woman who had received a passionate declaration of love, and it was expressed with an air of charmed solicitude, a radiant confidence that there was really no mistake about his being a most distinguished young man, and that if I chose to be explicit, I might deepen her conviction to disinterested ecstasy, which might have almost provoked me to invent a good opinion, if I had not had one ready made. I told her that she really knew Pickering better than I did, and that until we met at Homburg I had not seen him since he was a boy.

"But he talks to you freely," she answered; "I know you are his confidant. He has told me certainly

a great many things, but I always feel as if he were keeping something back ; as if he were holding something behind him, and showing me only one hand at once. He seems often to be hovering on the edge of a secret. I have had several friendships in my life—thank Heaven ! but I have had none more dear to me than this one. Yet in the midst of it I have the painful sense of my friend being half afraid of me ; of his thinking me terrible, strange, perhaps a trifle out of my wits. Poor me ! If he only knew what a plain good soul I am, and how I only want to know him and befriend him !”

These words were full of a plaintive magnanimity which made mistrust seem cruel. How much better I might play providence over Pickering's experiments with life if I could engage the fine instincts of this charming woman on the providential side ! Pickering's secret was, of course, his engagement to Miss Vernor ; it was natural enough that he should have been unable to bring himself to talk of it to Madame Blumenthal. The simple sweetness of this young girl's face had not faded from my memory ; I could not rid myself of the suspicion that in going further Pickering might fare much worse. Madame Blumenthal's professions seemed a virtual promise to agree with me, and, after some hesitation, I said that my friend had, in fact, a substantial secret, and that perhaps I might do him a good turn by putting her in possession of it. In as few words as possible I told her that Pickering stood pledged by filial piety to marry a young lady at Smyrna. She listened intently to my story ; when I had finished it there was a faint flush of excitement in each of her cheeks. She broke out into a dozen exclamations of admiration and compassion. “What a wonderful tale—what a romantic situation ! No wonder poor Mr. Pickering seemed restless and unsatisfied ; no wonder he wished to put off the day of submission. And the poor little girl at Smyrna, waiting there for the young Western prince like the heroine of

an Eastern tale ! She would give the world to see her photograph ; did I think Mr. Pickering would show it to her ? But never fear ; she would ask nothing indiscreet ! Yes, it was a marvellous story, and if she had invented it herself, people would have said it was absurdly improbable." She left her seat and took several turns about the room, smiling to herself, and uttering little German cries of wonderment. Suddenly she stopped before the piano and broke into a little laugh ; the next moment she buried her face in the great bouquet of roses. It was time I should go, but I was indisposed to leave her without obtaining some definite assurance that, as far as pity was concerned, she pitied the young girl at Smyrna more than the young man at Homburg.

"Of course you know what I wished in telling you this," I said, rising. "She is evidently a charming creature, and the best thing he can do is to marry her. I wished to interest you in that view of it."

She had taken one of the roses from the vase and was arranging it in the front of her dress. Suddenly, looking up, "Leave it to me, leave it to me !" she cried. "I am interested !" And with her little blue-gemmed hand she tapped her forehead. "I am deeply interested !"

And with this I had to content myself. But more than once the next day I repented of my zeal, and wondered whether a providence with a white rose in her bosom might not turn out a trifle too human. In the evening, at the Kursaal, I looked for Pickering, but he was not visible, and I reflected that my revelation had not as yet, at any rate, seemed to Madame Blumenthal a reason for prescribing a cooling-term to his passion. Very late, as I was turning away, I saw him arrive—with no small satisfaction, for I had determined to let him know immediately in what way I had attempted to serve him. But he straightway passed his arm through my own and led me off towards the gardens. I saw that he was too excited to allow me to speak first.

"I have burnt my ships!" he cried, when we were out of earshot of the crowd. "I have told her everything. I have insisted that it's simple torture for me to wait with this idle view of loving her less. It's well enough for her to ask it, but I feel strong enough now to override her reluctance. I have cast off the millstone from round my neck. I care for nothing, I know nothing, but that I love her with every pulse of my being—and that everything else has been a hideous dream, from which she may wake me into blissful morning with a single word!"

I held him off at arm's-length and looked at him gravely. "You have told her, you mean, of your engagement to Miss Vernor?"

"The whole story! I have given it up—I have thrown it to the winds. I have broken utterly with the past. It may rise in its grave and give me its curse, but it can't frighten me now. I have a right to be happy, I have a right to be free, I have a right not to bury myself alive. It was not *I* who promised—I was not born then. I myself, my soul, my mind, my option—all this is but a month old! Ah," he went on, "if you knew the difference it makes—this having chosen and broken and spoken! I am twice the man I was yesterday! Yesterday I was afraid of her; there was a kind of mocking mystery of knowledge and cleverness about her, which oppressed me in the midst of my love. But now I am afraid of nothing but of being too happy!"

I stood silent, to let him spend his eloquence. But he paused a moment, and took off his hat and fanned himself. "Let me perfectly understand," I said at last. "You have asked Madame Blumenthal to be your wife?"

"The wife of my intelligent choice!"

"And does she consent?"

"She asks three days to decide."

"Call it four! She has known your secret since this morning. I am bound to let you know I told her."

"So much the better!" cried Pickering, without apparent resentment or surprise. "It's not a brilliant offer for such a woman, and in spite of what I have at stake, I feel that it would be brutal to press her."

"What does she say to your breaking your promise?" I asked in a moment.

Pickering was too much in love for false shame. "She tells me that she loves me too much to find courage to condemn me. She agrees with me that I have a right to be happy. I ask no exemption from the common law. What I want is simply freedom to try to be!"

Of course I was puzzled; it was not in that fashion that I had expected Madame Blumenthal to make use of my information. But the matter now was quite out of my hands, and all I could do was to bid my companion not work himself into a fever over either fortune.

The next day I had a visit from Niedermeyer, on whom, after our talk at the opera, I had left a card. We gossiped a while, and at last he said suddenly, "By the way, I have a sequel to the history of Clorinda. The major is at Homburg!"

"Indeed!" said I. "Since when?"

"These three days."

"And what is he doing?"

"He seems," said Niedermeyer, with a laugh, "to be chiefly occupied in sending flowers to Madame Blumenthal. That is, I went with him the morning of his arrival to choose a nosegay, and nothing would suit him but a small haystack of white roses. I hope it was received."

"I can assure you it was," I cried. "I saw the lady fairly nestling her head in it. But I advise the major not to build upon that. He has a rival."

"Do you mean the soft young man of the other night?"

"Pickering is soft, if you will, but his softness

seems to have served him. He has offered her everything, and she has not yet refused it." I had handed my visitor a cigar, and he was puffing it in silence. At last he abruptly asked if I had been introduced to Madame Blumenthal, and, on my affirmative, inquired what I thought of her. "I will not tell you," I said, "or you'll call *me* soft."

He knocked away his ashes, eyeing me askance. "I have noticed your friend about," he said, "and even if you had not told me I'd have known he was in love. After he has been adored, his face wears for the rest of the day the expression with which he has risen from her feet, and more than once I have felt like touching his elbow, as you would that of a man who has inadvertently come into a drawing-room in his overshoes. You say he has offered our friend everything; but, my dear fellow, he has not everything to offer her. He evidently is as amiable as the morning, but the lady has no taste for daylight."

"I assure you Pickering is a very interesting fellow," I said.

"Ah, there it is! Has he not some story or other? Isn't he an orphan, or a natural child, or consumptive, or contingent heir to great estates? She will read his little story to the end, and close the book very tenderly and smooth down the cover; and then, when he least expects it, she will toss it into the dusty limbo of her other romances. She will let him dangle, but she will let him drop!"

"Upon my word," I cried, with heat, "if she does, she will be a very unprincipled little creature!"

Niedermeyer shrugged his shoulders. "I never said she was a saint!"

Shrewd as I felt Niedermeyer to be, I was not prepared to take his simple word for this event, and in the evening I received a communication which fortified my doubts. It was a note from Pickering, and it ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND—I have every hope of being happy, but I am to go to Wiesbaden to learn my fate. Madame Blumenthal goes thither this afternoon to spend a few days, and she allows me to accompany her. Give me your good wishes ; you shall hear of the result.
E. P."

One of the diversions of Homburg for new-comers is to dine in rotation at the different *tables d'hôte*. It so happened that, a couple of days later, Niedermeyer took pot-luck at my hotel, and secured a seat beside my own. As we took our places I found a letter on my plate, and, as it was postmarked Wiesbaden, I lost no time in opening it. It contained but three lines—

"I am happy—I am accepted—an hour ago. I can hardly believe it's your poor friend
E. P."

I placed the note before Niedermeyer ; not exactly in triumph, but with the alacrity of all felicitous confutation. He looked at it much longer than was needful to read it, stroking down his beard gravely, and I felt it was not so easy to confute a pupil of the school of Metternich. At last, folding the note and handing it back, "Has your friend mentioned Madame Blumenthal's errand at Wiesbaden?" he asked.

"You look very wise. I give it up !" said I.

"She is gone there to make the major follow her. He went by the next train."

"And has the major, on his side, dropped you a line?"

"He is not a letter-writer."

"Well," said I, pocketing my letter, "with this document in my hand I am bound to reserve my judgment. We will have a bottle of Johannisberg, and drink to the triumph of virtue."

For a whole week more I heard nothing from Pickering—somewhat to my surprise, and, as the days went by, not a little to my discomposure. I had expected that his bliss would continue to overflow in brief bulletins, and his silence was possibly an indication that it had been clouded. At last I wrote to his hotel at Wiesbaden, but received no answer; whereupon, as my next resource, I repaired to his former lodging at Homburg, where I thought it possible he had left property which he would sooner or later send for. There I learned that he had indeed just telegraphed from Cologne for his luggage. To Cologne I immediately despatched a line of inquiry as to his prosperity and the cause of his silence. The next day I received three words in answer—a simple un-commented request that I would come to him. I lost no time, and reached him in the course of a few hours. It was dark when I arrived, and the city was sheeted in a cold autumnal rain. Pickering had stumbled, with an indifference which was itself a symptom of distress, on a certain musty old Mainzerhof, and I found him sitting over a smouldering fire in a vast dingy chamber which looked as if it had grown gray with watching the *ennui* of ten generations of travellers. Looking at him, as he rose on my entrance, I saw that he was in extreme tribulation. He was pale and haggard; his face was five years older. Now, at least, in all conscience, he had tasted of the cup of life! I was anxious to know what had turned it so suddenly to bitterness; but I spared him all importunate curiosity, and let him take his time. I accepted tacitly his tacit confession of distress, and we made for a while a feeble effort to discuss the picturesque of Cologne. At last he rose and stood a long time looking into the fire, while I slowly paced the length of the dusky room.

“Well!” he said, as I came back; “I wanted knowledge, and I certainly know something I didn’t a month ago.” And herewith, calmly and succinctly enough, as

if dismay had worn itself out, he related the history of the foregoing days. He touched lightly on details; he evidently never was to gush as freely again as he had done during the prosperity of his suit. He had been accepted one evening, as explicitly as his imagination could desire, and had gone forth in his rapture and roamed about till nearly morning in the gardens of the Conversation-house, taking the stars and the perfumes of the summer night into his confidence. "It is worth it all, almost," he said, "to have been wound up for an hour to that celestial pitch. No man, I am sure, can ever know it but once." The next morning he had repaired to Madame Blumenthal's lodging and had been met, to his amazement, by a naked refusal to see him. He had strode about for a couple of hours—in another mood—and then had returned to the charge. The servant handed him a three-cornered note; it contained these words: "Leave me alone to-day; I will give you ten minutes to-morrow evening." Of the next thirty-six hours he could give no coherent account, but at the appointed time Madame Blumenthal had received him. Almost before she spoke there had come to him a sense of the depth of his folly in supposing he knew her. "One has heard all one's days," he said, "of people removing the mask; it's one of the stock phrases of romance. Well, there she stood with her mask in her hand. Her face," he went on gravely, after a pause—"her face was horrible!" . . . "I give you ten minutes," she had said, pointing to the clock. "Make your scene, tear your hair, brandish your dagger!" And she had sat down and folded her arms. "It's not a joke," she cried, "it's dead earnest; let us have it over. You are dismissed—have you nothing to say?" He had stammered some frantic demand for an explanation; and she had risen and come near him, looking at him from head to feet, very pale, and evidently more excited than she wished him to see. "I have done with you!" she said

with a smile ; “ you ought to have done with me ! It has all been delightful, but there are excellent reasons why it should come to an end.” “ You have been playing a part, then,” he had gasped out ; “ you never cared for me ?” “ Yes ; till I knew you ; till I saw how far you would go. But now the story’s finished ; we have reached the *dénouement*. We will close the book and be good friends.” “ To see how far I would go ?” he had repeated. “ You led me on, meaning all the while to do *this* !” “ I led you on, if you will. I received your visits, in season and out ! Sometimes they were very entertaining ; sometimes they bored me fearfully. But you were such a very curious case of—what shall I call it ?—of sincerity, that I determined to take good and bad together. I wanted to make you commit yourself unmistakably. I should have preferred not to bring you to this place ; but that too was necessary. Of course I can’t marry you ; I can do better. So can you, for that matter ; thank your fate for it. You have thought wonders of me for a month, but your good-humour wouldn’t last. I am too old and too wise ; you are too young and too foolish. It seems to me that I have been very good to you ; I have entertained you to the top of your bent, and, except perhaps that I am a little brusque just now, you have nothing to complain of. I would have let you down more gently if I could have taken another month to it ; but circumstances have forced my hand. Abuse me, curse me, if you like. I will make every allowance !” Pickering listened to all this intently enough to perceive that, as if by some sudden natural cataclysm, the ground had broken away at his feet, and that he must recoil. He turned away in dumb amazement. “ I don’t know how I seemed to be taking it,” he said, “ but she seemed really to desire—I don’t know why—something in the way of reproach and vituperation. But I couldn’t, in that way, have uttered a syllable. I was sickened ; I wanted to get away into the air—to

shake her off and come to my senses. 'Have you nothing, nothing, nothing to say?' she cried, as if she were disappointed, while I stood with my hand on the door. 'Haven't I treated you to talk enough?' I believed I answered. 'You will write to me then, when you get home?' 'I think not,' said I. 'Six months hence, I fancy, you will come and see me !' 'Never!' said I. 'That's a confession of stupidity,' she answered. 'It means that, even on reflection, you will never understand the philosophy of my conduct.' The word 'philosophy' seemed so strange that I verily believe I smiled. 'I have given you all that you gave me,' she went on. 'Your passion was an affair of the head.' 'I only wish you had told me sooner that you considered it so!' I exclaimed. And I went my way. The next day I came down the Rhine. I sat all day on the boat, not knowing where I was going, where to get off. I was in a kind of ague of terror; it seemed to me I had seen something infernal. At last I saw the cathedral towers here looming over the city. They seemed to say something to me, and when the boat stopped, I came ashore. I have been here a week. I have not slept at night—and yet it has been a week of rest !"

It seemed to me that he was in a fair way to recover, and that his own philosophy, if left to take its time, was adequate to the occasion. After his story was once told I referred to his grievance but once—that evening, later, as we were about to separate for the night. "Suffer me to say that there was some truth in *her* account of your relations," I said. "You were using her intellectually, and all the while, without your knowing it, she was using you. It was diamond cut diamond. Her needs were the more superficial, and she got tired of the game first." He frowned and turned uneasily away, but without contradicting me. I waited a few moments, to see if he would remember, before we parted, that he had a claim to make upon me. But he seemed to have forgotten it.

The next day we strolled about the picturesque old city, and of course, before long, went into the cathedral. Pickering said little ; he seemed intent upon his own thoughts. He sat down beside a pillar near a chapel, in front of a gorgeous window, and, leaving him to his meditations, I wandered through the church. When I came back I saw he had something to say. But before he had spoken I laid my hand on his shoulder and looked at him with a significant smile. He slowly bent his head and dropped his eyes, with a mixture of assent and humility. I drew forth from where it had lain untouched for a month the letter he had given me to keep, placed it silently on his knee, and left him to deal with it alone.

Half an hour later I returned to the same place, but he had gone, and one of the sacristans, hovering about and seeing me looking for Pickering, said he thought he had left the church. I found him in his gloomy chamber at the inn, pacing slowly up and down. I should doubtless have been at a loss to say just what effect I expected the letter from Smyrna to produce ; but his actual aspect surprised me. He was flushed, excited, a trifle irritated.

"Evidently," I said, "you have read your letter."

"It is proper I should tell you what is in it," he answered. "When I gave it to you a month ago, I did my friends injustice."

"You called it a 'summons,' I remember."

"I was a great fool ! It's a release !"

"From your engagement ?"

"From everything ! The letter, of course, is from Mr. Vernor. He desires to let me know at the earliest moment that his daughter, informed for the first time a week before of what had been expected of her, positively refuses to be bound by the contract or to assent to my being bound. She had been given a week to reflect, and had spent it in inconsolable tears. She had resisted every form of persuasion ! from compulsion, writes Mr. Vernor, he naturally shrinks. The young lady considers

the arrangement 'horrible.' After accepting her duties cut and dried all her life, she pretends at last to have a taste of her own. I confess I am surprised ; I had been given to believe that she was stupidly submissive, and would remain so to the end of the chapter. Not a bit of it. She has insisted on my being formally dismissed, and her father intimates that in case of non-compliance she threatens him with an attack of brain fever. Mr. Vernor condoles with me handsomely, and lets me know that the young lady's attitude has been a great shock to his nerves. He adds that he will not aggravate such regret as I may do him the honour to entertain, by any allusions to his daughter's charms and to the magnitude of my loss, and he concludes with the hope that, for the comfort of all concerned, I may already have amused my fancy with other 'views.' He reminds me in a post-script that, in spite of this painful occurrence, the son of his most valued friend will always be a welcome visitor at his house. I am free, he observes ; I have my life before me ; he recommends an extensive course of travel. Should my wanderings lead me to the East, he hopes that no false embarrassment will deter me from presenting myself at Smyrna. He can promise me at least a friendly reception. It's a very polite letter."

Polite as the letter was, Pickering seemed to find no great exhilaration in having this famous burden so handsomely lifted from his spirit. He began to brood over his liberation in a manner which you might have deemed proper to a renewed sense of bondage. "Bad news," he had called his letter originally ; and yet, now that its contents proved to be in flat contradiction to his foreboding, there was no impulsive voice to reverse the formula and declare the news was good. The wings of impulse in the poor fellow had of late been terribly clipped. It was an obvious reflection, of course, that if he had not been so stiffly certain of the matter a month before, and had gone through the form of breaking Mr.

Vernor's seal, he might have escaped the purgatory of Madame Blumenthal's sub-acid blandishments. But I left him to moralise in private ; I had no desire, as the phrase is, to rub it in. My thoughts, moreover, were following another train ; I was saying to myself that if to those gentle graces of which her young visage had offered to my fancy the blooming promise, Miss Vernor added in this striking measure the capacity for magnanimous action, the amendment to my friend's career had been less happy than the rough draught. Presently, turning about, I saw him looking at the young lady's photograph. "Of course, now," he said, "I have no right to keep it !" And before I could ask for another glimpse of it, he had thrust it into the fire.

"I am sorry to be saying it just now," I observed after a while, "but I shouldn't wonder if Miss Vernor were a charming creature."

"Go and find out," he answered, gloomily. "The coast is clear. My part is to forget her," he presently added. "It ought not to be hard. But don't you think," he went on suddenly, "that for a poor fellow who asked nothing of fortune but leave to sit down in a quiet corner, it has been rather a cruel pushing about?"

Cruel indeed, I declared, and he certainly had the right to demand a clean page on the book of fate and a fresh start. Mr. Vernor's advice was sound ; he should amuse himself with a long journey. If it would be any comfort to him, I would go with him on his way. Pickering assented without enthusiasm ; he had the embarrassed look of a man who, having gone to some cost to make a good appearance in a drawing-room, should find the door suddenly slammed in his face. We started on our journey, however, and little by little his enthusiasm returned. He was too capable of enjoying fine things to remain permanently irresponsive, and after a fortnight spent among pictures and monuments and antiquities, I felt that I was seeing him for the first time in

his best and healthiest mood. He had had a fever, and then he had had a chill; the pendulum had swung right and left in a manner rather trying to the machine; but now, at last, it was working back to an even, natural beat. He recovered in a measure the generous eloquence with which he had fanned his flame at Homburg, and talked about things with something of the same passionate freshness. One day when I was laid up at the inn at Bruges with a lame foot, he came home and treated me to a rhapsody about a certain meek-faced virgin of Hans Memling, which seemed to me sounder sense than his compliments to Madame Blumenthal. He had his dull days and his sombre moods—hours of irresistible retrospect; but I let them come and go without remonstrance, because I fancied they always left him a trifle more alert and resolute. One evening, however, he sat hanging his head in so doleful a fashion that I took the bull by the horns and told him he had by this time surely paid his debt to penitence, and that he owed it to himself to banish that woman for ever from his thoughts.

He looked up, staring; and then with a deep blush.—“That woman?” he said. “I was not thinking of Madame Blumenthal!”

After this I gave another construction to his melancholy. Taking him with his hopes and fears, at the end of six weeks of active observation and keen sensation, Pickering was as fine a fellow as need be. We made our way down to Italy and spent a fortnight at Venice. There something happened which I had been confidently expecting; I had said to myself that it was merely a question of time. We had passed the day at Torcello, and came floating back in the glow of the sunset, with measured oar-strokes. “I am well on the way,” Pickering said; “I think I will go!”

We had not spoken for an hour, and I naturally asked him, Where? His answer was delayed by our getting into the Piazzetta. I stepped ashore first and then turned

to help him. As he took my hand he met my eyes, consciously, and it came. "To Smyrna!"

A couple of days later he started. I had risked the conjecture that Miss Vernor was a charming creature, and six months afterwards he wrote me that I was right.

THE END.

